

Joint Meeting
Highland Township Board of Trustees
Highland Township Planning Commission
Highland Township Zoning Board of Appeals
Highland Downtown Development Authority
Record of the 1426th Meeting of the Planning Commission
Highland Township Auditorium
February 6, 2025

Roll Call:

Rick Hamill, Supervisor	Dave Gerathy, ZBA Chairman
Tami Flowers, Clerk	Michael Borg
Jennifer Frederick, Treasurer	Gary Childs
Grant Charlick, Trustee	Peter Eichinger
Brian Howe, Trustee (absent)	Robert Hoffman
Beth Lewis, Trustee(absent)	Anthony Raimondo
Joseph Salvia, Trustee	Chuck Benke
	Jacob Probe (absent)
Kevin Curtis, PC Chairman	
Roscoe Smith, Secretary	Michael Zurek (absent)
Chris Heyn	Christina Hamill
Mike O’Leary	Taylor DeHaan
Scott Temple	Cassie Blascyk
Russ Tierney (absent)	Andy West
Guy York	Dale Feigley (absent)
Michael Zeolla	

Also Present:

Elizabeth J. Corwin, PE, AICP – Planning Director
Kariline Littlebear, Zoning Administrator
Missy Dashevich, Highland DDA Executive Director

Visitors: 9

Supervisor Rick Hamill called the meeting to order at 7:15 pm. He thanked the participants for participating in the meeting, which was an opportunity to draw the active boards and commissions together to share progress and discuss the future.

Missy Dasevich started the discussion by highlighting projects that the HDDA and its various committees had undertaken in 2024, and statistics concerning investments and growth in the district. She announced that the HDDA Board had begun its process of updating the Highland Station Master Plan in anticipation of the renewal of the HDDA tax capture agreement with Oakland County. They are not requesting any changes to the zoning ordinance, but rather focusing on projects such as sidewalks and improving walkability and public art.

Cassie Blascyk described the HDDA project for the boardwalk across the Milford Road

frontage at the “Colasanti Pond”. The boardwalk is an important part of implementing the HDDA Master plan and the Township’s pathways plan. The contract has been awarded, and construction should start this month. The boardwalk will be built of steel helical piers with a concrete deck and timber guard rails. This will provide an important link between the residential properties in Highland Station and the commercial district along South Milford Road. Mr. Smith noted that this is an important link for the DDA goal of providing pedestrian walkways from Highland Station to the high school. The boardwalk will be eight foot wide and fully accessible.

Jenny Frederick noted that \$600,000 is budgeted for the project from the HDDA fund balance and the Township Capital Improvements fund. The HDDA collects about \$287,000 through tax increment financing in a year. The HDDA portion of the project is from savings and other fund raising as well. Tami Flowers noted that it has not been determined whether the \$250,000 from the Township Capital Improvements fund will be a loan to the HDDA or full participation.

Kevin Curtis and Grant Charlick described proposed changes to the Zoning Ordinance currently under study. One amendment that has been adopted in the last year a short term rental ordinance, that restricts “Air BnB” activity to the commercial districts. Rentals under 30 days are considered short term. Other rentals are covered by the Fire Marshal’s rental certification program.

Other topics under study include

- Event venues (Wedding barns) on agricultural properties.
- Commercial and recreational vehicle parking in residential zones
- Food trucks, especially as a temporary land use

Mr. Charlick asked the Zoning Board of Appeals to offer any areas of concern that they encounter regularly and would like to see revisited. Several members suggested a review of the high-water setback. Mr. Hoffman also suggested there should be more latitude for staff to approve minor “in-fill” projects for improvements that do not encroach farther into the setbacks than the current homes.

Ms. Blascyk asked for clarification on the thoughts about food trucks in the HDDA District. Mr. Charlick noted that one vendor had pushed and pushed the limits on temporary land use with a food truck on unimproved commercial property. Feedback from other business owners indicates that there is resentment that the temporary vendors are operating with a smaller investment and looser regulations.

Ms. Corwin explained that food trucks in the Highland Station district operate under a different 30-day permit that was staff approved. The Planning Commission is considering removing the 30-day permit from the ordinance. The HDDA would still be able to sponsor events and include food trucks at any festival or promotion. The food truck would be covered by the HDDA approval—an individual could not apply for a permit apart from the

sponsored event.

Taylor DeHaan asked if there was consideration of a food truck court option, such as Traverse City or the City of Ann Arbor offers. Mr. Charlick and Ms. Blascyk agreed that temporary food trucks are appropriate for events, but that Highland needs to encourage investment in its brick-and-mortar businesses. A permanent food truck installation would be counterproductive.

Guy York expressed his appreciation for the thorough design documents for the Highland Station area. He was very encouraged by the cooperation between the HDDA Design Committee and the Planning Commission and thought there was cohesive and synergetic energies in the collaboration with Sheetz. He regretted that the Sheetz organization did not see the benefit to offering a more attractive front to Ruggles Road.

Ms. Flowers encouraged the Planning Commission and all boards to participate in the development of a Capital Improvements Plan. Mr. Hamill noted that the administration comes and goes, but the Planning Commission can provide a more forward-looking program to guide investment and maintenance programs.

Supervisor Hamill explained his thoughts about the future of the parks. He noted that in Duck Lake Pines Park, they had recently installed pickle ball courts which have proven to be massively popular. The next focus is the outdoor skating rink, which has never effectively held water. He has tried repeatedly to find community partners to volunteer to correct the deficiencies. An alternative approach to repairing the rink is to tear out the pavement and convert it to a remote control (RC) vehicle arena, where participants can operate their RC vehicles.

Supervisor Hamill noted that over his tenure, he has had a very hands-on approach to facility maintenance. With the cooperation of others in the community, the Township has been able to implement many projects they would not have been able to afford otherwise. He recognizes that the Township needs to bring on a full time staff member with a wide range of skills to oversee and implement the maintenance needs of the community.

Supervisor Hamill also described the plan for reconfiguring Veterans Park at Livingston Road and John Street. With the new Sheetz project, the ticket station structure will be moved to Veterans Park for use as a stage. Ms. Blascyk and Michael Zeolla are helping to design a new layout.

At the Township properties near the library, there are areas that need to be cleared of invasive weeds to accommodate dog walkers. There are other invasive species efforts ongoing at other parks. Supervisor Hamill also applauded the efforts of the volunteer skate club that did all the fund raising and provided the labor to develop the skate area near the Chill at the Mill with no public funding.

Ms. Blascyk also highlighted preservation efforts underway at Steeple Hall, a new septic system and a new parking lot on the adjacent parcel.

Supervisor Hamill presented some slides that demonstrate the history of the corner of Highland Road, Milford Road, Ruggles and John Street. He reviewed the Master Plan from the Highland Station Master Plan and Design Guidelines, and the vision for the corner. He demonstrated that the Sheetz use is less densely developed and provides more green space than has been in the past or was envisioned to be in the future. He expressed his opinion that the community will find the site to be convenient and inviting and complimented all who had worked together to help Sheetz mold their plan to meet Highland Township needs.

Supervisor Hamill also shared images of the new mural on the east side of the old Fire Station (currently WOTA) at Veteran Park.

Supervisor Hamill called for public comment. Jim Lloyd noted that while he was not excited to see a gas station at the corner, he was pleased with the layout and the inclusion of a restaurant within the gas station. Given the layout, the site could still be useful in the future if society relies less on gas powered automobiles. Supervisor Hamill explained how he was helping the designers of the Sheetz site reconsider the plant materials and layout to provide a more appropriate landscape design for our area.

Supervisor Hamill took this opportunity to issue a public apology to Jane Lahring for his characterization of “rural character” linked to decaying barns. He respects the importance of working farms and their role in preserving the character of Highland.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A. Roscoe Smith, Secretary
ARS/ejc