

**Highland Township Planning Commission
Record of the 1413th Meeting
Highland Township Auditorium
May 16th, 2024**

Roll Call:

PLANNING COMMISSION

Grant Charlick, Chairman

Kevin Curtis (absent)

Chris Heyn

Mike O'Leary

Roscoe Smith

Scott Temple

Russ Tierney (absent)

Guy York (absent)

Also Present:

Elizabeth J. Corwin, Planning Director

Rick Hamill, Supervisor

Visitors: 1

Chairman Grant Charlick called the meeting to order at 7:35 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 comments were offered.

Public Hearing:

Agenda Item #2: Z-031 Text Amendment to permit gas stations for parcels fronting Highland Road (M-59) in the HS, Highland Station Business District and to establish regulations regarding same.

Ms. Corwin briefly described the zoning ordinance changes necessary to accommodate gas stations for the highway-oriented parcels in the Highland Station Business District. The ordinance includes an updated definition of an automobile gas station, a maximum height limit for gas station canopies, a relaxation of signage requirements to match the C-2, General Commercial dimensional requirements and some lighting provisions under canopies. Other provisions such as landscaping, parking, etc will comply with the same regulations applied elsewhere in the District and for similar non-residential properties.

Mr. Charlick opened the public hearing at 7:42 p.m. There was no public comment and the public hearing was closed at 7:44 p.m.

The Planning Commission discussed the ordinance briefly. Mr. Charlick was pleased that the temperature of LED lights in canopies was restricted to 3000K or whiter. This provision will apply to all canopies in any district. It was acknowledged that the lighting ordinance in general should be reviewed and that additional LED regulations are necessary for other types of lighting installations.

Mr. Charlick asked about how the ordinance addressed the concern raised by the subcommittee that the gas station would not be the only use on a site. Ms. Corwin explained that the definition had been changed so that the gas station is one of a variety of retail uses that co-exist on a site, rather than to simply prohibit gas station only. Industry trends will protect the community from attendant only gas stations, as they are simply not built anymore and rely on other sales to support the business. A gas station is a use subject to special approval, and if an inappropriate proposal is forwarded, it would not be approved.

Mr. Charlick also appreciated the addition of the language requiring the proposal to maximize separation to any adjacent residential properties.

Mr. Charlick made a motion to recommend approval of Ordinance Z-031 to allow for gas stations and drive thru windows in the Highland Station Business District with special approval. Mr. O’Leary supported the motion. Voice Vote: O’Leary – yes; Temple – yes; Charlick – yes; Heyn -yes; Smith – yes. The motion carried (5 yes votes, 0 no votes).

The ordinance will be forwarded to the Board of Trustees for a first reading at their June 3, 2024 meeting.

Work Session:

Agenda Item #3: Master Plan—Discussion of draft plan including future land use plan

Ms. Corwin explained that due to the number of approved absences of Planning Commission members at this meeting, she had excused the Planning Consultant from attendance, but was interested in any early feedback those present would like to give. The draft before them was essentially pieces of the plan that had been discussed multiple times at previous meetings. The only section of the plan remaining to be drafted is a summary of implementation recommendations based on the goals and objectives already expressed.

Ms. Corwin noted that she had heard back from two stakeholders with questions about the map. Mr. Jack Knowles believed that there was a mis-mapping of one parcel on the west side of S. Milford for parcels belonging to Jim O’Neill in Section 32. The Planning Commission had previously agreed those parcels were appropriate for multiple family land use designation. The other property owner was Mr. Joe Karcher who was present. Ms. Corwin had explained that a split designation was never meant to be apply rigidly to the dimensions of the mapping, but that any project that respected the transition between generally commercial activity and the existing residential at the west or south property lines could be considered. Mr. Charlick noted that the map was appropriate as drafted since a future property owner may have a totally different vision that Mr. Karcher had shared previously, and it was important to protect the interests of the neighboring residential property owners.

Ms. Corwin noted that the Supervisor had brought to her attention that the area of N. Milford Road between E. Wardlow and the LaFontaine private club (at the former bowling alley) should be reconsidered. There is a mixture of zoning along that corridor, and the recent conversation about restricting commercial activity to south of Wardlow seems inconsistent with the existing Master Plan. There are only about six or eight single family homes there, and this could be the next area to designate for small businesses to grow.

Mr. Temple was concerned about changing the demarcation between commercial and residential line on the maps, for fear of even further encroachment of commercial activity to the north. He was not as concerned about preserving future residential use of these specific parcels, but thought it was important to “hold the line”. He thought the community was nearing the point where we would just be done with commercial development, and not have to worry about future projects.

Mr. Hamill noted that this area has been the industrial/commercial area for years. If one wants a scenic route, one would head up Hickory Ridge Road. If you are considering residential character, this area is not apt to see reinvestment or improvement, but rather age out and decline. Its higher value is for commercial, where the community can better encourage improvement.

Mr. Charlick suggested that multiple family housing might be a good option. He thought that given the existing lot size, merely designating the area with some sort of non-residential use might lead to a pattern of development similar to that south of Wardlow Road, rather than the aggregation of parcels to allow for a more substantial development. He did agree that emerging businesses were challenged in raising the startup investment necessary to buy any of the existing industrial or commercial properties, and that it would be a benefit to having a place for startups. It is not sufficient to say that the Township has enough industrial land if the vacant land is all tied up in large acreage parcels with a barrier for entry for small business.

Mr. Hamill suggested that one of the issues we face is where to encourage new business. The Township ends up having to chase businesses out of residential areas and has nowhere to point those people to places they could afford to buy to run their business legitimately. He pointed to Highland Treatment as an example of a business that started on a small residentially used parcel and grew into something the community could be proud of.

Mr. Charlick thought the area could more readily be adapted to duplexes or small apartments, which would be compatible with the condos and manufactured housing developed on the west side of N. Milford Road.

Mr. Heyn cautioned that people are attracted to Highland for the peace and serenity, and that they are willing to commute to employment centers. He thought it was important to contain non-residential development.

Mr. Smith reviewed some history of how the area south of this focus area was originally designated for industrial use. Upgrading the use from residential offered an “out” for people who wanted to move away from the railroad. Allowing the commercial and industrial uses also offered opportunities for local entry level jobs. He suggested that it is better to designate areas that are already tending away from high quality residential property for non-residential uses in order to keep the pressure off other areas of the Township.

Ms. Corwin also noted that this focus area is also appropriate for extending the watermain, and it is unlikely to be economically feasible if there are older single family homes along the route.

Mr. Hamill suggested that while it is true that people are seeking serene surroundings, those people are not attracted to this area of North Milford Road. Highland needs to provide areas for people who do not have the wherewithal to buy lake front homes or acreage to live, because those people are often the service workers necessary to drive a local economy. He felt strongly that another land use designation should be designated for this stretch of N. Milford.

Mr. Charlick moved to table this discussion for the future when more members could participate in the discussion. Mr. Heyn supported the motion which carried unanimously by voice vote.

Committee Updates

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

No reports were offered.

Agenda Item #4: Minutes: April 18, 2024.

Mr. Charlick moved to approve the minutes of the April 18, 2024 joint meeting of the Planning Commission and HDDA as presented. Mr. Temple supported the motion, which was unanimously approved by voice vote with Mr. O'Leary abstaining.

Adjournment:

Mr. Charlick moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:21 p.m. Mr. Smith supported the motion, which was unanimously approved by voice vote.

Respectfully submitted,

A. Roscoe Smith, Secretary
ARS/ejc