

**Highland Township Planning Commission
Record of the 1383rd Meeting
March 17, 2022**

Roll Call:

Scott Green, Chairperson
Eugene H. Beach, Jr.
Grant Charlick
Kevin Curtis
Chris Heyn
Beth Lewis
Roscoe Smith
Scott Temple
Russ Tierney (absent)

Also Present:

Elizabeth J. Corwin, Planning Director
Doug Lewan, Carlisle-Wortman Associates (Planning Consultant)

Visitors: 10

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

Work Session

Agenda Item #1:

Parcel #	11-21-326-004
Zoning:	IM, Industrial Manufacturing
Address:	1470 Alloy Parkway
File#:	ZBA 22-08
Request:	Variances to allow fencing/outdoor storage in required front yard
Applicant:	Don Ellis, CSI Geoturf
Owner:	E5 Partners

Mr. Smith introduced the case, which is an initial review of a variance request to allow for secured, fenced outdoor storage in a required front yard for an existing business at 1470 Alloy Parkway, parcel 11-21-326-004. The zoning is IM, Industrial Manufacturing. The parcel is surrounded by IM, Zoning, including properties to the west of the property across the railroad tracks.

Ms. Corwin read a letter from the applicant, Mr. Donn Ellis, explaining his absence and identifying Mr. Brad Thompson of BF Thompson, PC, and Mr. Tom Robertson, CSI Geoturf as his representatives. Mr. Ellis intended to join the meeting via electronic means.

Mr. Thompson explained they were appearing to request an opinion of a variance request that would be presented to the Zoning Board of Appeals at a future date. The rationale for the request for outdoor storage in the front yard. Mr. Ellis has an opportunity to partner with White Cap to offer additional product that complements the existing product line of geotextiles and other drainage and soil erosion products. This requires an expansion of secured outdoor storage.

The neighbors to the north are National Self Storage, to the east is the Guardian Asphalt and an industrial building currently used for personal storage of the owner. To the south is LaFontaine Collision shop. The railroad lies to the west side of the Alloy Parkway. The building at 1470 was constructed around 1980 and has been used for manufacturing and warehousing continually since then, with parking and outdoor storage on the lot at the SW corner of the site as was allowed at that time. Alloy Parkway did not wrap around the lot as it does now.

Mr. Thompson noted that it would not be easy for Alloy Parkway to be extended beyond these existing businesses. There is residential land use farther to the east and no right-of-way exists to the south. Mr. Beach interjected that at one time, there was a master plan to extend Town Center Boulevard north to connect to Alloy Parkway, but apparently no right-of-way had been set aside.

The applicant proposes to upgrade the existing parking lot, providing the required 12 foot greenbelt for landscaping, and fencing the area with 6 foot high vinyl or wood privacy fence.

Ms. Corwin confirmed that the applicant has submitted a variance request. Staff anticipates that the ZBA will request an opinion; and has therefore scheduled the applicant to explain his project to the Planning Commission now. If approved, the applicant will reappear with a site plan amendment.

Mr. Beach noted that he was sympathetic to the plight of the applicant in dealing with the added restrictions of a corner lot configuration that came into play after the site was initially developed. He noted that outdoor storage is typically allowed on an industrial lot, provided it is noted on the approved site plan and screened with fencing. He acknowledged that the practical difficulty is inherent with the new setbacks and restrictions that happened since the land use was first established. He noted that the areas in question could be treated as de facto side lot lines, and that Alloy Parkway acted almost like a driveway, since it could not be extended to the south.

Mr. Green explained that the action of the Planning Commission tonight would be advisory to the Zoning Board of Appeals, and that there was nothing today to approve. He cautioned the applicant that a positive report to the Zoning Board of Appeals would not necessarily lead to an easy site plan approval in the future.

Mr. Temple asked for clarification of the parking needs. He was concerned that an expanding business would typically mean greater demand for parking. Mr. Roberson explained that the existing parking lot is not currently used by the property owner to much effect. The vehicles observed there today are overflow parking from the LaFontaine Collision shop on the south side of Alloy Parkway. There are additional parking areas currently utilized by staff and visitors farther north on the site.

The applicant, Mr. Donn Ellis joined the meeting via Zoom.

Mr. Beach moved to direct staff to forward the unapproved minutes pertinent to this discussion to the Zoning Board of Appeals for their consideration. Mr. Temple supported the motion which passed by voice vote.

Agenda Item #2

Parcel # 11-21-326-004
Zoning: MH, Manufactured Home Park
Address: Vacant, W. Highland
File#: SPR 22-05
Request: Site Plan Review for Manufactured Housing Community
Applicant: CC Highland Hills Property, LLC
Owner: CC Highland Hills Property, LLC

Mr. Lewan introduced the request for site plan review of the Highland Hills Manufactured Housing Community expansion. He explained that under state law, the local community is restricted as to what can be reviewed. The state pre-empts local zoning in a manner similar to the way the preempt review of public schools. The Mobile Home Commission Act limits the local authority to the preliminary plan review and approval—the final plan will final approval and permits will be issued by the State of Michigan. It is notable that our Zoning Ordinance relative to Manufactured Housing Communities offer little in way of regulation—the Mobile Home Commission sets such standards as setbacks, lot sizes and street widths.

Mr. Lewan described the regulations as outlined in his letter of March 11, 2022, noting that the proposal satisfies the seven criteria laid out in Section 9.04 of the Zoning Ordinance.

Mr. Green clarified for the audience that the discussion tonight is not regarding whether or not the park may be expanded (which is controlled by a different authority at the State of Michigan,) but rather whether the site layout complies with standards and how it will look as far as site access, berms and such design factors. Mr. Lewan added that the property is already properly zoned and master planned for a Mobile Home Park. If this were a rezoning matter, the community would have additional input. Mr. Beach noted it has been zoned for Mobile home Park for more than 40 years.

Ms. Kim Scott, of Cambio Homes presented the project. She explained that Cambio had purchased the existing park and adjoining properties last year. The property was neglected and in disrepair. Cambio Homes specializes in identifying distressed properties and revitalizing them to provide affordable housing opportunities for the local community. Since Cambio purchased the property, they have worked to remove blighted and abandoned homes and bring in newer homes, repave the streets, repair the infrastructure and improve the landscaping, pavilion, club house, and swimming pool. The community will be referred to as “the Estates of Highland Hills”.

Mr. Bill Anderson, Atwell (engineer for Cambio Homes) explained that the site for the expansion of 301 homesites on 97 acres adjacent to the existing mobile home park. The existing park has 304 homes on about 149 acres. There is an existing wastewater treatment facility on the north end of that property. There are two lot sizes, 55 feet wide by 110 feet deep and 110 feet wide by 70 feet deep, which is referred to as a “residential set.” Approximately 42 percent are the wider lots, and 47 percent back up to open space.

There will be one boulevard entrance opening to a recreational feature with a clubhouse, pool and walking trails. The community will offer amenities such as sidewalks, nature paths, bocci, pickleball and the like. The clubhouse will offer programmed social events, craft rooms and similar social opportunities.

The water supply will be through a connection to municipal water at M-59, and the first phase of the project will be served by the existing wastewater treatment system to the north.

The overall density is about 3.1 units per acre, which includes more open space than industry standard. They have set the homesites as far off M-59 as practical, and have placed the stormwater retention basin at the entrance to the park to preserve the desired appearance of open space in the Township.

Mr. Beach asked about the aesthetic of the park. Ms. Scott explained that this would be a 55 plus, age restricted community. The homes would be newer homes, doublewides, vinyl sided, shingle roof and upgraded skirting. The homes will range from about 1500 to 1800 square feet, with lots sized for garages and carports. Cambio Homes considers this to be an “upscale” community.

Mr. Beach asked about connection to the existing park at Sycamore and asked for explanation of the second new curb cut to M-59. Mr. Anderson pointed out that the site plan has been amended to eliminate one curb cut, with the street connection to the existing park. Mr. Beach asked if the two parcels would be combined since the wastewater treatment plant is fully contained on the east parcel. He was concerned about long term service for the new park should the ownership of one parcel change. Mr. Anderson explained that there has been no decision about whether to combine the lots, but was confident that satisfactory easement and operation agreements could be developed.

Mr. Beach asked the applicant to verify that there was sufficient capacity to serve the first phase development, and whether known operational deficiencies had been addressed. Ms. Scott verified that assumption and noted that Cambio was still working on some remedial actions to address other concerns.

Mr. Green asked about the second clubhouse, and thought this would discourage interaction between the communities. He also asked how age restrictions are enforced. Ms. Scott explained that the existing park residents would not have access to the amenities of the Estates of Highland Hills. The age restriction is enforced through the park rules, and the age restriction will be noted on the permit issued by the State of Michigan.

Mr. Heyn was concerned about the tax structure. Ms. Scott explained that the tenants pay \$3.00 per month in their lot rent for school taxes, and that the property owner will also pay real property taxes based on the value of the land and site improvements.

Mr. Temple asked about ownership of the homes. Ms. Scott explained that the tenants at the Estates of Highland Hills will own the homes and rent the lots. The existing park has a combination of owned and leased homes. Mr. Heyn asked if the homes could just be moved offsite if the tenant chose to leave. Mr. Anderson and Ms. Scott explained that it was not easy to move the homes, and it was generally cost prohibitive to move, especially if the site has been developed to include a garage or carport.

Mr. Charlick asked how many communities Cambrio Homes owns. Ms. Scott explained about 30 communities in Michigan. Mr. Charlick asked if others had privately owned sewage disposal systems. Ms. Scott explained that was common. Mr. Charlick asked if Cambio had contacted Michigan Department of Energy, Great Lakes and Environment. Ms. Scott and Mr. Anderson explained they have been working with EGLE for a year on the existing park. Mr. Charlick was concerned that the basis of design for the existing system is based on standards from the 1970's. Ms. Scott explained that there is a current permit. Mr. Charlick thought it was important to know that there was a solution for the expansion before the site is cleared.

Ms. Scott explained that the lagoon system is operating below capacity. She noted that the eastern lagoon is not even currently utilized. Atwell has completed an assessment of the system in the fall, and very little sludge was present. She noted there are physical improvements yet to be made, but that they have contractors lined up to complete the improvements.

Mr. Charlick reiterated that he thought it was improper to proceed with approvals of the park until there are permits for sewer and water. He was further concerned that the Township should not provide municipal water since there is no oversight over the specifications of the internal water system, since watermain breaks in the park would impact the entire Township water system. Mr. Anderson explained that there is a significant incentive to the park to maintain and correct deficiencies since the water is metered and the park will pay for lost water. Mr. Beach summarized the concern that the Manufactured Home community would be a "weak link" in the water system.

Mr. Charlick also noted that he had spoken with the Fire Marshal that afternoon, and that he had expressed concern about the geometry of the hammerhead turnarounds.

Mr. Charlick was concerned about mass grading the site prior to resolving the utility issues, and the impacts to wetlands. Mr. Anderson noted that there are four nominally sized wetlands, below the threshold of regulation. He agreed that there would be some balancing across the phases. Mr. Anderson explained that the final engineering was not complete, but Atwell was confident there was adequate space to accommodate the sewage disposal system for the entire 301 units.

Mrs. Lewis asked about the occupancy rate of such parks across the state and country. She was curious about supply and demand and how quickly the park might fill. Ms. Scott explained that recently they had purchased a senior community in Ionia that was 70 percent full. The barrier to filling the park had been capital to purchase inventory for sale, and the supply chain. In a similar community in Canton Township, Cambio had sold 100 homes in eleven months. Mr. Beach commented that there is a housing shortage in the region, particularly for "starter homes," and that properly managed manufactured housing communities do not carry the stigma that neglected and deteriorating parks of the past have.

Mr. Green asked what happens if a homeowner dies or is unable to pay his lot rent? Ms. Scott said often the family sells the home and that the park management works with the homeowner to help with the sale. Mr. Beach noted it was no different than ownership in a high rise condominium.

Mr. Smith asked about amenities on the existing park, since he would hate to see a social class "divide". Ms. Scott explained that they have been working on many amenities for existing park. They have increased occupancy from 36 homes to 100 homes in the last year. They run credit checks, criminal background checks and otherwise screen the new residents. There is onsite

management and security. There is no “right side/wrong side” of the parks—just different demographics of the occupants.

Mr. Curtis asked if the amenities would be shared across the two parks. Ms. Scott explained that this would not be possible as the one side is geared to active senior lifestyles and the existing side is geared to families.

Mr. Green allowed some public comment.

Marsh Boetsch, 2027 Woodridge Court; She is a teacher in the Huron Valley School District. She feels the homesites are nearer to her home than she was told to expect when she moved in 24 years previously. She was concerned about past disturbances in the existing park, the noise and view of the trailers. She thought it was unfair to build a new park when the older park still had vacancies. She was upset about blighted buildings in the existing park, and thinks there are too many trailer parks in Highland Township.

Walter Jambeck, 2007 Woodridge was curious about the nature trail, since there is no room between the property boundary and the homesites.

Gary Boetsch asked about how the buffer between the new lots and Timber Ridge subdivision would be handled, and whether there would be a berm, fencing, or more trees.

Ms. Corwin noted that the Fire Marshal had provided a memo to the file expressing an interest in seeing grass pavers across the open spaces to join the streets, and a restriction prohibiting on street parking. He was satisfied with the hydrant coverage. She also noted that the Fire Marshal had expressed recently that he was less concerned upon reflection about the turnarounds since the streets were not very deep. Mr. Anderson noted that there are topographical constraints, and the streets could not be connected across the open space. He also asked the applicant to comment on whether the wetlands had been delineated; is there a chance that they are considered interconnected and therefore regulated?

Ms. Corwin also noted that there was a review letter from the Township engineer identifying a number of permits that would be required but expressing no serious concerns with the design concepts.

Mr. Lewan noted that his report identified a few issues, primarily with regards to the landscaping. The landscaping plan does address the requirements; but suggested that the plan be amended to include a note that indicates that after construction, the landscape screen would be supplemented as necessary to achieve the screening levels required under the ordinance. He also noted that signage would be reviewed and approved through the appropriate permitting process in the future.

Mr. Lewan noted that he understands that although the streets in the existing park appeared to be designed for future extension to this parcel, he now understands that this new park is intended to be a different product and that the street extensions are not appropriate. He suggested the applicant comment on visitor parking.

Mr. Lewan also suggested there might some discussion of what other design alternatives had been considered that might have preserved natural features like the wooded areas and wetlands.

Mr. Green asked if the plan should be tabled to provide an opportunity for response of the applicant.

Mr. Lewan explained that the Planning Commission must look at this differently than a typical site plan. State law provides only 60 days for response, or the preliminary plan is presumed approved unless it is denied. Ms. Corwin stated she thought she had heard nothing in the discussion that could not be approved subject to a condition.

Mr. Beach asked the applicant if they would work out details with staff and consultants. Mr. Anderson agreed.

Mr. Beach asked if there were constraints that prevented the designer from shifting the entire design to the east, to increase the buffer to Timber Ridge subdivision. Mr. Anderson explained that there is a natural gas pipeline along the east property line, and that they had worked to preserve the wooded area to the north. They also have to leave room for the sewer. He agreed to reconsider during final design and may be able to shift the development about ten feet to the east.

Mr. Beach asked if a fence could be considered along the west property line, at least where the homes off Timber Ridge were nearer. Mr. Anderson noted that given the grading plan, the manufactured homes would be six to ten feet lower than existing homes. He thought it would be more disruptive to install a fence.

Mr. Beach moved to approve the preliminary plan for Highland Hills Manufactured Housing Community expansion provided that further details be submitted for final staff review of reasonable and adequate landscape screen along the west property line, particularly so that lots 15 through 25 are screened from the adjoining subdivision. Mrs. Lewis supported the motion.

Mr. Charlick asked what happens if the permits are not obtained before the clearing is completed. Ms. Corwin noted that if permits are not obtained, there would clearly be no development, and if a significant change was required to obtain permits, the property owner would have to bring back the new plan. Mr. Green noted that any property owner may clear their land without a site plan approval.

Mr. Beach asked if there was interest on the part of the Fire Chief in adding a gated entrance at the back of the Fire Station property rather than use the crossovers to loop back to the site. Ms. Corwin explained that she had discussed this with the Fire Chief and he thought it would be too far and costly to build the driveway. If necessary, he would use the bike path along M-59 to bring command onto the site in a passenger vehicle to prepare for the tankers.

Mr. Charlick offered an amendment to the motion to include approval of the Fire Chief for site access and the turnarounds. Mr. Beach and Mrs. Lewis accepted the amendment.

Mr. Beach asked the applicant about onsite parking, particularly for visitors. Mr. Anderson explained that there will be three parking spaces at each site, and that many homes will have garages, which increases the effective available spaces.

Mr. Beach asked also if golf carts will be allowed. Ms. Scott explained that this has not been considered yet.

Mr. Green also suggested an amendment to the original motion that the applicant make a reasonable effort to move the site layout to the east, which was accepted by Mr. Beach and Mrs. Lewis.

Ms. Corwin read back the motion as stands: Moved to approve the preliminary plan for Highland Hills Manufactured Housing Community expansion provided that further details be submitted for final staff review of a reasonable and adequate landscape screen along the west property line, particularly in the area of lots 15 through 25; and further that details be submitted for Fire Chief approval of site access and turnarounds and that the designer will make a reasonable effort to move the site layout to the east. Mr. Beach and Mrs. Lewis agreed to the amended motion as read. Roll Call vote: Heyn-no; Temple-yes; Lewis-yes; Green-yes; Beach -yes; Charlick-no; Curtis-yes; Smith-yes. Motion passes (6 aye, 2 nay).

Agenda Item #3: Text Amendments for wedding venue

Ms. Corwin asked that this agenda item be tabled since no progress has been made since the March 3, 2022 meeting. Mr. Beach moved to table until April 7, 2022. Mr. Temple supported and the motion carried by voice vote.

Agenda Item #4: Master Plan Discussion

Ms. Corwin noted that the Planning Commission has received a memo from Mr. Lewan with a copy of the survey as distributed in 2016 and an assignment to start considering land use of underutilized properties.

Mrs. Corwin suggested the Planning Commission needs to address a few questions: Should the survey be changed; how the survey should be distributed and how might we handle other community visioning events.

She noted that in the past, the survey was distributed by mail to one quarter of the households, and responses were manually entered by staff. There was discussion over whether the survey could be distributed via a weblink so that respondents could work through it online.

Mr. Green offered a few criticisms of the survey. He thought it was important to leave the survey intact as much as possible to compare trends in the data. First, he noted that there is no way to weigh the priorities and tie it to capacity to offer services. The survey presents a wish list and does not ask for a willingness to pay for the improvement.

Mr. Lewan said he has structured surveys to attempt to answer that before by asking a secondary set of questions such as would you pay "X" dollars in your taxes to cover the costs of this amenity or service.

Mr. Smith was a little confused about question 25, which asks how the Township can best communicate with its residents. Ms. Corwin explained that this question had been added to the 2016 survey at the request of the Community Round Table. Mr. Beach suggested replacing it as follows: "Which of the following are your sources of news about the Township," with lists of news outlets and social media sources such as the Spinal Column, Milford Times, Highland Matters, NextDoor, and similar.

Mr. Green asked what percentage of surveys must be returned to be statistically representative of the community? He would like to set a goal that if we don't receive a target number of responses, we would scrap the results. Ms. Corwin and Mr. Smith explained that past surveys were well received, with 30 to 40 percent of the surveys returned. Mr. Lewan said without doing a specific analysis, he believes a statistically significant response is on the terms of a few percent of the households, and that the ten to twelve percent is excellent.

Mr. Smith noted that the important thing is that everyone has an equal opportunity to be represented.

Mr. Beach noted that the survey has two spikes: One to legitimately seek the opinions of the residents; the second is to protect against challenges of the Master Plan

Mr. Temple suggested we complete the paper distribution of the survey, but also provide an alternate digital experience where anyone could respond, although it is difficult to qualify those responses as legitimately tied to Township residents.

Mrs. Lewis asked if we had sent the survey out in the tax bill in the past. Ms. Corwin explained that this method was used by the Community Round Table. Mr. Green noted that this would only go out to tax payers and property owners, and would not reach all residents.

Ms. Corwin asked for more input about venues where the visioning sessions could be held. Local churches and the golf clubs were suggested. Mr. Lewan suggested that bringing the sessions to different neighborhoods is highly effective, and that virtual sessions should not be discounted. It would also be effective to record a visioning session and post it on the Township website to solicit comment.

Mr. Beach thought this could be effectively tied to the survey, where a few minutes of a recorded presentation could be used to set the stage for a question. Ms. Corwin thought this was an option to imbed right into the digital survey.

Mr. Green summarized the direction: Staff and the planning consultant should revise the survey as discussed, Planning Commissioners should review the questions and provide additional feedback by email, and staff should explore how to best distribute the survey.

Agenda Item #5:

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

Committee updates were discussed.

Agenda Item #6:

Mr. Beach moved to approve the minutes of March 3, 2022 as presented. Mr. Charlick supported the motion which passed by voice vote.

Mr. Beach moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:05 p.m. The motion was supported by Mr. Charlick and passed by voice vote.

Respectfully submitted,

A.Roscoe Smith, Secretary
ARS/ejc