

YATES TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING FOR MASTER PLAN INFORMATION SESSION
FINAL MINUTES March 4, 2023 2 p.m. EST

Chairperson Grier calls the Information Session to order at 2 p.m.

This is a public listening session so there is no formal agenda and no items for deliberation or decision.

Present: Secretary Blair Evans, Chair Chris Grier, YTB Rep. & Ex-officio Shawn Coffey, Commissioner Amy Ellis, and Commissioner Kurt Johnson

Absent: Commissioner Julia Carr, and Commissioner Lester Walker

Chair Grier:

Reminds the audience that the current Master Plan (2010) is available on the Township website and at the Township office.

Secretary Evans:

Clarified that even though the Master Plan (MP) is over 10 years old, it is currently valid because the Planning Commission did officially review the current plan (2020).

Chair Grier:

Commented on the purpose of a Master Plan as a long range roadmap.

Keep these 4 questions in mind.

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to go?
- How do we get there? and
- What will it be like when the plan becomes a reality?

The Planning Commission (PC) is focused on making sure that the citizens' voices are heard.

Chair Grier asked Secretary Evans to give some context for the Master Plan.

Secretary Evans:

Gave a view of the related documents:

- Master Plan is about land use and relates to implementing the strategic goals.
- Strategic Plan has goals that provide a guidepost for master planning. (The Township adopted it last summer.) Master plan is a policy document.
- Zoning ordinances are the implementation of the land use defined in the MP.

Process

1. The PC gets community input to create a MP for the board to approve.
2. The MP will contain a future land use plan.
3. This shows how our pattern of land use should potentially change in the future.
4. The zoning ordinance will come into play to then steer activity toward that future land use.

Parameters

- Township policies that we follow to control some parts of how we go about the process.
- Standard Operating Procedures are being written to ensure fair treatment of everyone under the ordinances.

Zoning Team to perform the zoning duties in the township consists of:

- Township Board,
- Planning Commission,
- Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) and
- Zoning Administrator (ZA).

Secretary Evans continued:

Gave a brief description of roles with emphasis on community input in planning.

We are at the beginning of the MP amendment process. Secretary Evans explained the role of early input in the community driven planning process and why we are asking for input to shape the language. After the plan is created there will be a public hearing to get input on the specific plan that is written. We are asking for what you feel is important upfront that can be considered while writing the plan.

Chair Grier:

Reinforced the opportunity for you to understand what is happening and to give early input before the plan development begins. Outlined major areas addressed in the Master Plan – land use, transportation, utility infrastructure, community development, and residential development.

Chair Grier:

Responded to a question from the audience for introductions of the Planning Commissioners. Two Planning Commissioners are absent and those in attendance are introduced: Commissioner Amy Ellis, Commissioner Kurt Johnson, Chair Chris Grier, Ex-officio Shawn Coffey, Secretary Blair Evans. Absent are Commissioner Lester Walker and Julia Carr.

Chair Grier:

Asked Secretary Evans to comment on changes that have occurred since the Master Plan was written in 2020.

Secretary Evans:

Lists several ways that the world has changed since 2010 and gave examples including the marijuana industry, internet as an essential utility, green energy, economic changes, population and business changes in Yates and the neighboring towns providing services.

Question from the audience:

What falls under “land use”?

Commission:

Discussed areas like different intensities of residential and commercial, scope of sewer and natural gas services, etc.

Question from audience:

Is the commission planning on changing any of the residential or commercial?

Commission:

Clarified that the PC hasn't made any plans to change anything yet, we are gathering information.

Follow-on question from audience:

Are there potential adjustments or changes in land use under consideration?

Secretary Evans:

Responded that anything under land use may be adjusted or changed if there is a reason based on changing conditions and needs. We identified several required things that were not in the old plan so those will be changes in the plan. Beyond that it will be determined by conditions and what is required to fulfill the townships goals.

Chair Grier:

Reinforced the range of considerations related to land and the role of input and planning to relate those to our township goals.

Chair Grier:

Introduced the Strategic Plan which is available on the website. A part of the executive summary was read as an overview. It was clarified that what was read was the “preferred future” statement, not a current description of Yates Township.

Chair Grier opens the floor for discussion:

18 people in the room, 14 participants on zoom and 4 people watching on Facebook.

Noted although we each have individual desires for Yates Township that are critical to capture, we also have an obligation to consider those who are not here as part of the collective. Think of where Yates Township should be over the next 20 years.

Public Comment:

Agricultural, residential and commercial should remain distinct. There shouldn't be spot zoning. Discussion to clarify the meaning of spot zoning.

Public Comment:

Follow up on prior comment to also oppose exceptions or specific approvals to vary from the ordinances in a way that is not in keeping with the area. Discussion of the roles and difficulty of use variances.

Secretary Evans:

Clarified that there seems to be a specific concern about a specific area and activity. The administration of the ordinances is 2 levels below what this meeting is for. The ordinances themselves are a layer below. Preserving important characteristics of areas of the township is exactly what this meeting is about. So please zoom out some to speak to the area and the character that is important.

Public Comment:

Described the need to preserve the character in the areas around S Nelson Rd and the concern is due to an advertised campground and RV park in an Agricultural district. Also mentioned environmental and safety concerns.

Secretary Evans:

Asked if the group could send a brief written description of what the area means to the people in it and what is important to preserve in the character of that area to the PC email address.

*Brief conversation with Secretary Evans about the importance of historical tradition and character along with what the expectations were of owners based on the zoning. That must also be considered against the fact that if nothing is ever changed then things may not be able to improve.

Public Comment:

Expressed that a way of looking at it is that development in Idlewild and around the lakes is expected, but moving that into the more rural areas is objectionable to many including multi-generational property owners.

Public Comment:

The possibility for tiny homes and horse stables should be considered. Request for submission on ideas on how the idea relates to the character of the possible locations and how it may enhance or detract. Concern expressed about camping impact on lakes. Discussed the general idea of defining the balance between camping use and watershed management.

Chair Grier:

Indicated that historically tiny houses ("Dog houses") and horse stables (Sarge's) were historically part of Idlewild. Not a statement for or against. Just background.

Call for Zoom members to comment:

Debora Haugabook:

Stated that she has purchased acreage on S Nelson Rd near Camp Rd and is opening up campgrounds this summer. 40 Ac parcel, has been in communication with the township for the last year and a half with a lot of back and forth. Plans to seek a license and will be a licensed campground. Area is Agricultural but also in a historical camping area near former CCC and Good Shepherd campgrounds. Requests that "the Master Plan includes the opening and any thing required for the opening of my campgrounds." Stated advantages for the area and the presence of a large Facebook group. Stated that she is here and the

Master Plan and the zoning ordinance needs to make way for her business coming in. Notes that the current Master Plan mentions the need for an RV park.

Secretary Evans:

Commented on the related comments for and against the specific project. Any specific project may need; to have a PC approval for site plans, and if it requires rezoning would also have to come before the township board, and is not familiar with either one of those things happening on this project. So that is something that would have to happen and in either of those cases the body hearing the request would consider the pros and cons and make a determination based on that.

Debora Haugabook:

Made statements about her history of dealing with the township and her desire to have the township not impede the progress of her project.

Secretary Evans:

Clarified the history of interaction or lack thereof with the Planning Commission and himself personally. He further reviewed and commented on the need for an effective Zoning Administration to process and direct proposals and the role of the Planning Commission in the master planning process vs individual projects.

Note: an exact transcript of the prior two comments is included as an attachment to these minutes for clarity of the record.

Public Comment:

In reference to RV Park off of Nelson – concern about water pollution and protection of the Pere Marquette River from impact of camping nearby. Stated that the state of Michigan shut down its camps on Nelson Rd due to environmental concerns.

Chair Grier:

Asked to redirect the conversation away for concerns about specific projects and towards master planning considerations.

Public Comment:

Expressed a viewpoint that Nelson Rd is not Idlewild, but is considered Chase.

Secretary Evans:

Indicated that a master planning level concept that should be noted is the possible need for a buffer zone adjacent to waterways or in watersheds for certain types of activities.

Chair Grier:

Acknowledged that elevating personal areas of issue to general concepts of planning is a difficult process.

Public Comment:

That it would be helpful to have something to look at to help focus on the bigger picture.

Chair Grier indicated that there was a conscious decision that the master plan was too large to make large numbers of copies. It is readily available electronically. Discussion that the MP, SP and other supporting documents are too large to continually make paper copies of.

Public Comment:

Question of location of Central business district.

Secretary Evans:

Gave the location in the current master plan. Indicated that future use could be different as the nature of local businesses have changed.

Public Comment:

Question on the version of the current MP and amendments.

Secretary Evans:

Confirmed that the current MP is 2010 with no amendments. Asked that everyone refer to the Master Plan Information Packet (MPIP) to see the review checklist of areas that will definitely be amended.

Public Comment:

To cover all of the Pierre Marquette tributaries in the MP.

Secretary Evans:

Indicated that the PC will be soliciting input from local associations and had reached out to the Pere Marquette association with no response. Asked anyone who was connected to connect them so that their knowledge could be incorporated.

Public Comment:

Question about businesses opening outside of the Central Business District (CBD). Is it allowed and what is required?

Secretary Evans:

Indicated that all business isn't restricted to the CBD, but that is an area that the township will focus resources and infrastructure to support business success. The zoning allows specific types of business in different places.

Public Comment:

Can the MP address easements?

Discussion of the relevance of addressing ghost roads and legacy easements at the MP level.

Public Comment:

Can the parcels of state property be addressed in the Master Plan (especially in the community of Idlewild)?

Discussion of the relevance of looking at consolidation or trades of state, federal, township and private lands whose locations seem to be more of an historical accident than planned or purposeful.

Public Comment:

Encouraging the Master Plan addressing the fractured small lots in platted areas and encouraging consolidation or structuring to promote land for new residential construction.

Public Comment:

Question on the availability of the zoning map.

Discussion on the map that is available and efforts to produce a clearer version.

Chair Grier:

Asked for additional input on organizations who can participate in the process.

Session ended.

Transcript of claim by Deborah Haugabook and clarification from Secretary Evans

Deborah Haugabook stated

“Blair, I have been working with you for a year and a half and you have known this for a year and a half and I have gotten a lot of delays from the township. So at the final hour don't talk to me about approval from the planning commission, the planning commission, including yourself, has known about this for a year and a half, so I would appreciate if the township not throw roadblocks at the final hour.”

Secretary Evans responded:

“To clarify the planning commission has never received an application and the planning commission can never make a decision on something that it has never had an application on. That is step one.” “The second thing is, as I indicated earlier, it is the responsibility of the Zoning Administrator to process things like this. So every time that I have been approached I have sent people to the zoning administrator. We have never gotten anything at the planning commission to address and we have never gotten anything at the ZBA to address. So from a procedural perspective, things don't happen randomly, there is a process. There have been some areas of dysfunction within the township government, in Zoning Administration and some others. We have lanes, the Planning Commission can't do the Zoning Administrator's job, the PC is responsible for evaluating things that the ZA does. The ZBA has boundaries, the PC has boundaries and the ZA has responsibilities. If things don't happen with the ZA then things don't get where they are supposed to go.

When people come and ask about getting things done we direct them to where they are supposed to go, if that hasn't worked then that is unfortunate but that is the best that a PC can do. I have tried to provide guidance in terms of here is how the process works, so that is to give clarity on that one point.” “Again, there is a process that has to happen in order for things to move forward. What I was about to say after the procedural aspect is from a master planning aspect we don't spot future land use in the context of master plans just like you don't spot zone in the context of zoning.

I think that what will come up in a master planning process is the character of the area, the effective uses of the areas, the carrying capacity of the area based on certain types of activities – roads and watersheds and whatever. All of those things will come into play to determine what areas of the township are conducive to what types of activities. The responsibility of the Planning Commission for land use isn't to make any project work for any person and it is also not to impede any person on any project. The point is to think overall – where is the best place for certain things to be and to establish a land use pattern that represents that.

I happen to think that a lot of the goals that you mentioned are fantastic. I haven't gotten into a level of detail to know whether the place that you are talking about doing it is the right place for that to happen or maybe someplace else in the township is the right place for that to happen. We haven't gotten that far at the master planning level, and it hasn't been brought to the Planning Commission specifically (as a project) to be able to do that and that may be because the ZA didn't move it. Either way that is where we are so my point on this – and I hear both sides and I appreciate both sides – from the PC our responsibilities are to figure out broadly speaking what areas are conducive to what activities and what will benefit the best growth in the township. It is not to make any specific person's investment pay off, it is not to preserve a specific person's property value, it is to come up with a balancing that moves the township forward respecting everybody's interests in the process and that is, at least from my perspective on the planning commission, what we intend to do.

Now moving into other aspects involving the mechanics of permits and zoning and site plans and all of that kind of thing, it is really important that the township have working departments. I think that we have had an issue of the department of Zoning Administration not moving things, and the township attorney gave us a lecture this morning on the importance of the zoning administrator quarterbacking things. In our collective training we learned the same thing – we have a lane on the Planning Commission, we have a lane on the ZBA, and the Zoning Administrator has a responsibility to do things. The best that we can do is to direct people to where they are supposed to go. That is a whole other set of things and that is at a level of detail below what the Planning Commission is doing from a Master Planning perspective. The objective is - what areas are conducive to what activities for the greater good overall. So I would suggest from the commenter

just now the same thing that I asked from the person who had concerns about the project – document how this enhances the character of the area, not just the project, but how is this compatible with, beneficial to, consistent with the character of the area or how does this enhance what the character of the area could be. Then that would put us in a position to have a conversation on land use to figure out what is the right balance.

I am just talking through the way we would process these things. This meeting is absolutely not about any specific project. We can use projects as examples to raise some ideas that we need to look at in a broad sense. And that, I believe, is where we are trying to go.”

Respectfully Submitted

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Blair Evans". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Secretary Blair Evans