

**PLANNING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING
MINUTES
Wednesday, August 19, 2009**

I. Call to Order - Pledge of Allegiance - Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call **Francis McNamara – present**
 Donald Hartwick – absent w/notice
 Keri Kittmann – absent w/notice
 John Maahs – present
 Ronald Overton – present
 Richard Turcotte – present
 Ulrika Zay – present
 Charles Openlander – present
 Beth Ball – absent w/notice

Also present – Andrea Polverento, Planning Director, **George Weitzel**, Board of Trustees Member, **Daniel Zay**, **Harriet Smith** and **Tonia Olsen**, Granger.

II. Communications Received – None.

III. Agenda Approval

MOTION by **OVERTON** and seconded by **OPENLANDER** to approve the agenda as presented.

Passed unanimously

IV. Public Comment – Non-Agenda Items - None

V. Approval of Minutes - None

VI. Public Hearings - None

VII. Unfinished Business - None

VIII. New Business

A. Zoning for Wind Turbines

Polverento briefly discussed the issue of zoning for wind turbines and the goals for the meeting.

Turcotte explained that this is not a public hearing and there will be an open discussion on this topic. He asked the audience if they had any comments or questions.

Harriet Smith wants to see some kind of regulation for controlling how many turbines there are and where they are placed.

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Turcotte questions how wind turbines will be incorporated into the current ordinance. **Polverento** made suggestions on how that would be accomplished.

Overton feels that turbines need to be allowed and guidelines and parameters should be set. He feels it should be done even though the Township is not in a good wind area. The likelihood of a utility size wind farm is very small. The most likely location would be on top of the landfill at Granger. **Overton** discussed some of the regulations in place by the state. He feels that if the state has put guidelines out, they should consider just following the state's guidelines rather than making their own.

Maahs asked if solar energy should be looked at as an alternative energy source that would need to be incorporated into the ordinance as well.

McNamara asked **Smith** about locations and quantity and if she could elaborate as a resident where she would like to see them located. **Smith** responded she lives in an agricultural area, she is not a farmer but for 60 years she has lived in that environment and appreciates it. She would like to hear a farmer's view on wind turbines.

Zay asked if a wind farm would be considered an agricultural use or a utility. **Tonia Olsen** explained how it can change the property tax structure.

Maahs is in favor of the coexistence of wind turbines and agriculture activity. He feels the two uses are relatively compatible. **Maahs** himself as a farmer feels if having a wind turbine was economically viable, he would get one.

Overton explained that he saw a documentary about a farm in Germany and they were growing corn and above the rows were solar collectors and above those were wind turbines. **Overton** asked **Smith** if the costs were affordable and a homeowner could have a turbine like they have at Horrocks, would she want to have that option available to her. Discussion took place about what sizes should be a permitted use and what sizes should fall under a special land use.

Turcotte explained that it is part of the state law that no matter what scale you are producing alternative energy you have the right to sell that back to the power company.

Maahs asked if the Township has the ability to change the determining factor between a residential use and commercial from the height of the tower to how much electricity the turbine generates.

Tonia Olsen explained that if the farmers in the area are being approached by companies that sell the wind turbines, she feels there might be a need for education for the public in this area. People need to understand how these things work, the return on their investment, what is involved in connecting the grid. Granger has done studies on the hill and if it may create a microclimate where the turbine would get more wind than at ground level. The studies are showing there would be a slight increase but that a return on this type of investment right now is questionable.

Polverento has been to the MSU extension workshops and they have been excellent in educating farms and large land owners about how to be careful about dealing with wind

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turbines. **Polverento** feels there should be a focus on advertising the opportunities that are available to the public for education.

Olsen also pointed out that the Governor appointed a wind/energy board. They have recently conducted a study that identified the 5 key areas in the state that would be targeted for the large wind farm developments. They are all in the coastal areas.

The Planning Commission took a five minute recess.

Daniel Zay does not think there is enough benefit that the Township will be targeted for the larger utility wind farms. **Zay** does not agree with there being a threshold based on the power output of the turbine. Technology is changing rapidly; it may be easier to limit the turbines by the size of the property they are placed on. He feels that there will be a deployment of systems that are complimentary systems, turbines and a solar array. Also, small fuel cells may become popular as well; those are smaller and not as obvious to a passerby.

Openlander commented that part of the tie to public utility at the farm level is the infrastructure of the utility line. You have to be near or close to the grid to tie into it. **Openlander** would like to know more about the issues that Bengal Township is having. He feels that concentrating on the big utility wind farms is not a big priority.

Overton feels that the key issue is the impact of the types of turbines placed on residential property and the impact that has on the resident's neighbors. He feels that as a township, they need to encourage and be permissive of alternative energy. **Overton** feels that the state recommendations should be followed to the letter. He also feels that utility size uses need to be covered as a special land use. The landfill is a potential candidate that may wish to put in large turbines.

Turcotte suggested based on the comments from the Commission and audience that the priority is small systems for private use and the effect on neighbors. He also suggested that the Ordinance Review Committee develop Ordinance language. **Turcotte** asked if the state guidelines describe private use in the way they would want to use it in the Township. **Polverento** explained that the state guidelines suggest that less than 20 meters are the small systems. Height is the overall factor for the state recommendation. **Polverento** feels that the districts that wind turbines are permitted in will have to be specified in the ordinance. She feels that they will need to tweak the state guideline to some degree.

McNamara feels it should be sent to the ORC to have them look at creative sample language for an ordinance around residential private use.

Turcotte noted that there are a number of specific uses that the ORC will need to deal with such as height, noise etc.

Discussion took place regarding specifics that the ORC should consider when drafting language.

Turcotte feels that the ORC needs guidance to set thresholds.

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Weitzel asked about Delta Township's Ordinance. **Polverento** discussed the Delta Township Ordinance.

Polverento explained that other communities surrounding the township are working on this issues. She feels it's important to carefully look at the other communities ordinances. The township does not want to have a big difference in the community for what is permitted by our neighbors. She feels it is a good idea to keep the regulations fairly similar.

Turcotte discussed safety of the turbines and what things the ORC should be concerned with when it comes to safety considerations.

Overton feels that the ORC should address small scale wind turbine systems that would generally be permitted by right in most of the Township however the things they should consider is setback, noise, construction codes, safety issues, shadow flicker, bird/bat kill and decommissioning. He also feels the zoning districts they are allowed in should be considered.

Olsen explained that based on Granger's studies, base foundation is a key safety component. Most of the turbines have specs that have to be met relative to their height and the type of turbine they are. Also, a concern is the icing of the blades and that ice thawing and falling to the ground.

Zay suggested that the ORC start with a simple ordinance that addresses some of the concerns and then after a few of the turbines are placed in the township, fine tuning the ordinance as the need arises and as technology changes.

Smith asked if a turbine could be shared between property owners.

Overton does not see any reason why a turbine could not be shared. Normally if several residents are sharing a turbine it's going to be above 20 meters and would then have to be a special land use and at that point any conditions the Planning Commission felt were appropriate could be applied. **Polverento** feels that to be cost effective residents may very well want to share a turbine 20 meters or under. She feels this issue should be considered.

Turcotte does not feel that height should be the breaking point.

MOTION by **MAAHS** and seconded by **OVERTON** to forward to the Ordinance Review Committee the comments received at the work session for review and recommendation to the full Planning Commission.

Motion Passed 6-0, 3 absent

MOTION by **TURCOTTE** and seconded by **OVERTON** to amend the previous motion having the Ordinance Review Committee focus only on small turbines that are 20 meters or less.

Motion Passed 6-0, 3 absent

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IX. Committee and Staff Reports - None

X. Comments and Questions from Audience, Staff and Commissioners- The Planning Commission requested that **Polverento** get information regarding the issues with wind turbines in Bengal Township.

XI. Adjournment

MOTION by **OVERTON** and seconded by **MAAHS** to adjourn the meeting.
Passed unanimously

Meeting was adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Date approved:

Richard Turcotte, Chair

John Maahs, Acting Secretary