

The Athens Township Zoning Commission
Regular Meeting October 16, 2019
6pm The Plains Public Library
Meeting Minutes

The Athens Township Zoning Commission met in regular session on October 16, 2019 at 6pm at The Plains Public Library, 14 S. Plains Rd. The Plains

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

With Chairperson Sean Jones absent, the meeting was called to order by Vice-Chair Brian Dearing at 6pm. Commission members Brian Dearing, Rick Fernow, Michael Hornsby, Thurlin Maynard, and Ken Robinson were in attendance.

MOTION TO ACCEPT MINUTES FOR 10/9/2019

Mr. Dearing motioned that the minutes for the previous meeting appeared to be in order, and for the Commission to accept the minutes as entered.

Dearing: Yes; Fernow: Yes; Hornsby: Yes; Maynard: Yes; Robinson: Yes

DISCUSSION OF WEBSITE CREATION WITH ROMAN WARMKE, EDEN MARKETING

Roman Warmke of Eden Marketing was invited to discuss the establishment of a Zoning Commission website, the creation of official email addresses for commissioners, and the implementation of a potential Facebook page. Mr. Warmke had created the Athens Township website, and the Zoning Commission page would be an additional tab on that website. Mr. Warmke said the current website is underutilized, though township employees are proactively using email services. Mr. Warmke cautioned against having his company set up our Facebook page, as he was not an expert on the proceedings of the Commission, and that Facebook is rather basic with its set-up and posting features.

Mr. Warmke said that his company charges \$75 per hour for labor, with a website hosting fee of \$25 per month. As an alternative, commissioners could learn how to post to the website ourselves, using the Wordpress interface. Mr. Warmke noted email could be accessed through webmail, email software such as Outlook, or mobile email programs. Various design elements of the webpage and web postings were mentioned. E-mail address creation, and syncing with our existing Gmail addresses was discussed. Mr. Warmke would only need a list of our email addresses to set it all up and confirmed that auto-forwarding of email was not an issue. Mr. Dearing felt we should keep the same format as all township employees. Mr. Robinson was asked to send the relevant info to Mr. Warmke for email creation.

PUBLIC COMMENT

In order to respect Mr. Warmke's schedule, public comment was moved out of order on the agenda. Two members of the public were in attendance: James Bond and Amy Stevens. Both were present only to observe the proceedings and made no formal comments.

JOHNSON ROAD EXIT DISCUSSION

Mr. Dearing mentioned a spate of recent accidents happening at the Johnson Road intersection on U.S. Rt. 33. Mr. Dearing felt it was relevant to the Zoning Commission because closing access to the road would impact the long-term planning of The Plains. Mr. Dearing wondered if it would be beneficial for the Commission to draft a letter of recommendations concerning the intersection to the County Engineer and the Ohio Department of Transportation. Mr. Maynard noted that the Johnson Road intersection had been dangerous for decades. Mr. Fernow wondered why a stoplight or an overpass hadn't been considered for the intersection. Mr. Dearing referenced a plan from County Engineer Jeff Maiden to close off the Johnson Road intersection and create an underpass for access to The Plains. Mr. Maynard and Mr. Robinson wanted to hear more from Mr. Maiden.

Mr. Maynard made a motion for Mr. Dearing to approach Mr. Maiden about the continuing problems with Johnson Road and possible solutions. Mr. Robinson seconded.

Dearing: Yes; Fernow: Yes; Hornsby: Yes; Maynard: Yes; Robinson: Yes

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

With Mr. Jones absent, and his expertise of zoning code respected, commissioners unofficially decided to focus on the comprehensive plan instead of continuing the zoning discussion. Mr. Eichenberg encouraged the Commission to formulate a vision of The Plains. He felt such a vision would help the process move along, and create a sense of confidence in our decisions. Mr. Eichenberg also encouraged us to begin some survey work with the public. Finding out what's important to the public at large is a critical element of the zoning plan.

Street improvements were discussed with the impending upgrade of Elm Street used as an example. The need for bike lanes on Johnson Road and Route 682 was recognized. Mr. Dearing said a concerned citizen approached him about the proposed Bailey Trail System mountain biking project and the potential impact of 90K or more visitors to the area per year. Mr. Eichenberg suggested we should think ahead about business zoning in relation to the project.

Transportation became a focus: Mr. Dearing remarked about HAPCAP's expansion of busing routes to Nelsonville, and supported the creation of a transfer point in The Plains. Mr. Robinson said bus usage in The Plains appeared to be expanding, and bus shelters up and down Route 682 would be a potential plus.

Safety was the next topic; including sight lines, street lighting, and criminal activity. Mr. Dearing quoted Sheriff Smith as saying that the crime rate for The Plains was actually low based on our population. Mr. Maynard mentioned that zoning would allow street lighting to be codified. Mr. Eichenberg suggested the use of shielding lights, which didn't pollute your neighbor's property or the night sky. There was a general consensus that street lighting needed to improve in the subdivisions.

Mr. Eichenberg expressed a desire to have 20-30 minutes at each of the next few meetings to continue this discussion. He also wished to discuss water & sewer planning, hoping to touch base with Rich Kasler and the Athens County Commissioners as to where they foresee future development.

Survey discussion continued, including potential use of the school listserv and the need to go door-to-door when promotion of the plan is underway. Mr. Eichenberg intimated that surveys should be general in nature; focused on taking the temperature of resident concerns about their properties—whether that be real estate values, noise issues, street improvements, or their property rights.

DISCUSSION OF PUBLIC COMMENTARY OUTSIDE THE PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Concerns were raised about the need to reinforce that questions and comments from the public should be limited to the formal public comment session so as not to interfere with the business of the Commission. Mr. Dearing thought public interaction was great, but deviating from business for continuous explanation extended the meeting beyond its desired scope and time.

Mr. Maynard motioned to open discussion to questions from the public at the end of each regular meeting, relevant only to that night's meeting, with a limit of 3 minutes per participant and a total of 15 minutes maximum. Mr. Fernow seconded.

Dearing: Yes; Fernow: Yes; Hornsby: Yes; Maynard: Yes; Robinson: Yes

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Eichenberg stated he had sent out an email to commissioners moments before the meeting of a map of existing land use in The Plains, as classified by the auditor. He is hoping it will help to stimulate discussion of potential land use categories at future meetings.

MOTION TO ADJOURN

With no further business, Mr. Maynard motioned to adjourn. Mr. Dearing seconded.

Dearing: Yes; Fernow: Yes; Hornsby: Yes; Maynard: Yes; Robinson: Yes