

The Athens Township Zoning Commission  
Regular Meeting September 25, 2019  
6pm The Plains Public Library  
Meeting Minutes

The Athens Township Zoning Commission met in regular session on Sept 25, 2019 at 6pm at The Plains Public Library, 14 S. Plains Rd.

#### **CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL**

Meeting was called to order by Chairperson Sean Jones at 6pm  
Commission members Sean Jones, Brian Dearing, Ken Robinson, Thurlin Maynard, and Rick Fernow in attendance.

Also present was Bob Eichenberg, Round River Planning & Design, and community member Michael Hornsby.

#### **MOTION TO ACCEPT MINUTES FOR 9/18/2019**

Mr. Jones motioned that the minutes for the previous meeting appeared to be in order, and for the Commission to accept the minutes as entered. With no comment on the minutes, Mr. Dearing seconded.

Jones: Yes; Dearing: Yes; Robinson: Yes; Maynard: Yes; Fernow: Yes

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

While there were no comments from members of the public, Mr. Dearing invited community member Michael Hornsby to apply with the Athens Township Trustees to be an alternate for the Commission. Mr. Hornsby has attended each meeting of the Commission since its inception, and provided unique insight to the Commission as a lifelong resident of the township with family roots in The Plains.

#### **MOTION TO NOMINATE MICHAEL HORNSBY AS AN ALTERNATE**

Mr. Jones made a motion to email the Athens Township Trustees on the behalf of the Commission, to approve Michael Hornsby as an alternate. Mr. Robinson seconded.

Jones: Yes; Dearing: Yes; Robinson: Yes; Maynard: Yes; Fernow: Yes

#### **DISCUSSION OF COMMISSIONER E-MAIL ACCOUNTS AND POTENTIAL WEBSITE**

Mr. Dearing reported on his communication with Athens Township Trustee Ted Linscott about the creation of official governmental email accounts for the Commission, and the establishment of a website (provided as a link or standalone site) to the existing Township web space. Mr. Linscott foresaw no potential issues with either.

Mr. Jones was concerned that, since the Commission was heavily reliant on the use of Google apps and Docs, non-Google email accounts might compromise the business of the commission (including communication between members, and the creation of draft zoning maps). Mr. Robinson noted nothing was found to deem Google accounts off-limits, but offered that official government email addresses give legitimacy, as well as ease of record access to the public. Mr. Robinson had suggested the potential to sync accounts, agreeing that Google Docs was an essential tool for the Commission.

## **MOTION TO REQUEST THE CREATION OF OFFICIAL EMAIL ACCOUNTS FOR COMMISSIONERS**

Mr. Dearing motioned that Mr. Jones communicate with the Athens Township Trustees to create official governmental email accounts for zoning commissioners, alternates, and Mr. Eichenberg. Mr. Jones made a counter-motion for Mr. Dearing to take on the responsibility. Mr. Robinson volunteered to do it. Mr. Jones motioned for Mr. Robinson to contact the Athens Township Trustees about the email accounts, with Mr. Dearing seconding.

Jones: Yes; Dearing: Yes; Robinson: Yes; Maynard: Yes; Fernow: Yes.

Mr. Eichenberg noted that it was important to have records at the ready for public request. Robinson advised that our records should be filed with the trustees promptly. Mr. Fernow mentioned Ohio Sunshine Law.

## **DISCUSSION AND CREATION OF POTENTIAL ZONING MAPS**

Mr. Fernow questioned if one person would be in charge of the official zoning map, instead of the five commissioners individually making maps on their own. Mr. Jones assumed we would be working off a master map together. Mr. Dearing offered that he was enjoying the group process of creating the map at the Commission meetings. Mr. Jones provided maps of three potential zoning area targets, of varying size, to begin discussion. A short examination of possible boundary lines followed, including the use of rivers, highways, and the bike path as obvious boundaries to consider. Mr. Eichenberg encouraged commissioners to look at where growth might happen in the future, especially flat areas out of the floodplain. Commissioners focused as to where the southern boundary of the zoned area might be placed. Mr. Dearing discussed the future use of The Plains Elementary School Land Lab as a zoned park, with a commuter sidewalk trail. Mr. Eichenberg supported this forward-thinking approach, noting that a park and walking area were ideal components of a comprehensive plan. Building upon the zoning map started at the 9/18 meeting, Commissioners roughed out a preliminary map for directional boundaries ("Preliminary Map 1").

## **MOTION TO ADOPT PRELIMINARY MAP 1**

Mr. Jones motioned that "Preliminary Map 1" be adopted as a basis for boundaries of the area to be zoned. Mr. Fernow seconded.

Jones: Yes; Dearing: Yes; Robinson: Yes; Maynard: Yes; Fernow: Yes

## **DISCUSSION OF ZONING CODES**

Commissioners continued to review existing zoning codes from other communities to use as a starting point for the creation of our own township code. Zoning codes from Lithopolis, Devola, and Albany were under consideration. Responding to a question from Mr. Dearing, Mr. Eichenberg advised the Commission to start from a larger code example, and cut out portions deemed unnecessary. Mr. Jones concurred. Mr. Fernow failed to see how the Lithopolis code would be any better than Albany's, agreeing with Mr. Eichenberg with the need to start big and whittle our way down.

Mr. Jones brought up the issue of sign ordinances, arguing that the Athens sign ordinance was an irritation for businesses. Mr. Dearing wondered if the zoning of signage could be added at a later date, post-vote. Mr. Robinson thought we should take care of the issue now instead of re-visiting it later. Mr. Eichenberg advised "not to make it too bureaucratic". Mr. Jones asked if a simple sign code could be adopted. Mr. Dearing reminded us of our "zoning light" approach. There seemed to be general consensus of avoiding a large-scale sign ordinance for The Plains entirely, deferring instead to limitations within each zoning designation.

## **MOTION TO USE DEVOLA AS BASIS FOR ZONING CODE**

After a short discussion of the appreciation of Devola's use of plain language and avoidance of legal jargon, Mr. Jones motioned to use Devola's Zoning Code as the basis for the creation of our own zoning code. Mr. Robinson seconded. Mr. Dearing abstained, explaining he had not had time to read the Lithopolis code for comparison. Mr. Jones withdrew his motion, and tabled it to the next meeting to give commissioners ample time to read both the Devola Code and Lithopolis Code completely.

## **ZONING DISTRICTS**

A lengthy discussion of zoning districts, including business vs. residential use, took place. Mr. Dearing felt that the obvious business corridors were Route 682, Johnson Road, and Connett Road, with the rest of The Plains arguably seen as residential first. He also felt that the first blocks immediately from Route 682 would be for mixed business and residential use. Mr. Eichenberg advised not to worry about existing businesses, which are grandfathered in under any new zoning ordinance. Mr. Eichenberg then explained how grandfathering works within a newly-zoned area. Mr. Jones felt that, for practical purposes, businesses should be centered on Route 682. Johnson Road and Connett Road were seen as a "business light" zone. The elementary school area was acknowledged as an example for the need for residential zoning to protect from future encroachment of those neighborhoods.

## **AGENDA FOR NEXT MEETING AND MOTION TO ADJOURN**

Mr. Jones proposed a partial agenda for the Commission's next regular meeting: discussing business districts and focusing on codes. Mr. Eichenberg advised that we consider potential industrial sites and what types of business zones and residential zones we wanted.

Mr. Dearing then made a motion to adjourn, with Maynard seconding.  
Jones: Yes; Dearing: Yes; Robinson: Yes; Maynard: Yes; Fernow: Yes.