

**PRAIRIE TOWNSHIP ZONING COMMISSION
MINUTES OF APRIL 26, 2011 MEETING**

Members Present: Howard Balzer, Glen Hymer, Hulda Moffitt, Bruce Whyte

Members Absent: Christopher Finn

Others Present: Connie Swisher, zoning inspector; Dana Scott, zoning clerk

Call to Order: Mr. Balzer called the meeting of the Prairie Township Zoning Commission to order at 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, April 26, 2011, at the Township Hall.

Meeting Minutes:

Mr. Balzer asked for a motion to approve or correct the March 22, 2011, Prairie Township Zoning Commission Meeting Minutes.

Mr. Whyte made a motion to approve the March 22, 2011, Prairie Township Zoning Commission Meeting Minutes as written.

Mr. Hymer seconded the motion.

Roll call as follows:

1. Glen Hymer Aye
2. Hulda Moffitt Aye
3. Bruce Whyte Aye
4. Howard Balzer Aye

The motion was approved unanimously.

Old Business:

ADOPTION PROCESS FOR BIG DARBY TOWN CENTER MASTER PLAN

Ms. Swisher said that she was going to review the adoption process for the Big Darby Town Center Master Plan and, in particular, explain the upcoming role of the Zoning Commission related to the process. She invited Commission members to view the Microsoft PowerPoint slides that accompanied her presentation.

Ms. Swisher stated that she was not going to review the entire Town Center Plan, but rather from start to finish note where we are as of today and focus on what is expected of the Township Zoning Commission in the adoption process going forward.

PRESENTATION HIGHLIGHTS

Big Darby Accord Watershed Master Plan

The Big Darby Watershed covers 555 square miles in central Ohio. It flows from Logan County 84 miles south to the Scioto River near Circleville. The Big and Little Darby Creeks have been designated State Scenic Rivers. Any development within the watershed must be carefully planned and managed.

In an effort to achieve that goal, ten jurisdictions¹ within Franklin County worked together with the Environmental Protection Agency, Franklin County Soil & Water, Nature Conservancy, and many others to prepare *The Big Darby Accord Watershed Master Plan*.

The Big Darby Accord Watershed Master Plan, completed in 2006, is as a multi-jurisdictional guide for responsible development and conservation within the 84 square miles of the watershed.

Big Darby Town Center Master Plan

The Big Darby Accord Watershed Master Plan provides tools to assist all ten jurisdictions with conservation development strategies that will assist in protecting environmentally sensitive areas.

In addition to the creation of conservation development districts, the plan includes policies for creating land use patterns that can be served by existing infrastructure to create places that increase the quality of life of residents and visitors, such as the Town Center.

In 2009 Urban Design Associates along with a team of other experts² produced the Big Darby Town Center Master Plan. This Master Plan is an in-depth concept for the development of the core of the Big Darby watershed—the Darby Town Center. It is an undertaking of four jurisdictions: Franklin County, city of Columbus, Brown Township, and Prairie Township.

The purpose of the Town Center is to allow future development to be located in a less environmentally sensitive portion of the Big Darby Watershed.

The goal of the Town Center development is to create a highly desirable mixed-use area that includes a full range of residential, retail, office, and public uses including parks and open space. Retail uses should face key streets to create a lively and visually appealing community.

The Town Center core should be a safe, attractive, efficient walkable area with convenient connections to residential neighborhoods and nearby transit.

¹ City of Columbus; city of Hilliard; Grove City; Brown Township; Norwich Township; Pleasant Township; Prairie Township; Washington Township; village of Harrisburg; and Franklin County.

² Applied Ecological Services; RCLCO; Design Workshop; STV, Inc.; Walter Kulash; and Bricker and Eckler.

The outer edges of the Town Center should be designed in a manner that allows for a transition to its surrounding uses and should evoke special characteristics that set it apart and make it unique. The urban, high-density core of the Town Center should gradually transition into more rural style development like conservation development and open space.

The Town Center should include four types of housing stock: single-family detached, duplexes, three-family townhouses, and mansion-style flats. The number of residential units anticipated to occur within the Town Center is approximately 3,500 units. These units should have elements such as front porches and stoops, pitched roofs, dormers, and small wings to reinforce their residential character.

The Darby Town Center Master Plan envisions 300,000 square feet of commercial space, 360,000 square feet of office development, and a 100-room hotel.

The greatest cost associated with development of the Town Center is extending Columbus water and sewer infrastructure to the site.

Changes to Big Darby Town Center Master Plan

Ms. Swisher noted that there have been changes to the Big Darby Town Center Master Plan as visualized in the Big Darby Accord Watershed Master Plan.³ These changes are largely because of the significant downturn in the economy since 2006, as well as design modifications recommended by Urban Design Associates (UDA).

It is critical that the Town Center Master Plan balances current market realities with the principal goals and vision of the Big Darby Accord Watershed Master Plan

Market Realities:

In 2006, the vision included 5,000 units of housing and 1.5 million square feet of commercial space with an anticipated build-out of about 20 years. In 2011, there is no justification for this amount of development.

In 2011, The Town Center Master Plan recommends 3,500 residential units and 700,000 square feet of commercial space with an anticipated build-out of about 30 years.

Location:

Originally envisioned to be located between West Broad Street and Interstate 70, the site for the Town Center has been moved south—with the majority of its 2,500 acres being located south of West Broad Street. The southern portion of the Town Center falls primarily in Prairie Township.

The initial Darby Accord site posed the following issues:

³ *Big Darby Accord Watershed Master Plan*, section 3.3.1, page 3.15.

- Wetlands and stream corridors, significant stands of mesic forest, and hydric soils are not developable. These natural features are dedicated to conservation and restoration goals. Intense development in this area would be counter to the principles of the Big Darby Watershed Master Plan.
- The railroad right-of-way and the sub-watershed divide provide constraints for infrastructure expansion, specifically sewer, water, and road access, to the north and west of the Town Center site. Although road access, sewer connections, and water piping are physically possible, they carry additional costs that far outweigh financial and environment benefits of intense development in the area.

New Interchange at I-70:

The Darby Accord envisioned that the Town Center would develop westward and have its primary access via a major gateway on U.S. 40 and a new interchange on I-70.

In 2011, based on the transportation analysis, a new interchange at I-70 is not justified or needed to support the Town Center. Further, ODOT is not currently evaluating this alternative, and no design investigation has begun by the State.

New Business:

WHAT'S NEXT:

ADOPTION PROCESS FOR BIG DARBY TOWN CENTER MASTER PLAN

Each jurisdiction involved is responsible for taking the Master Plan forward. The adoption process consists of review and action by the following entities in order as listed:

Franklin County

- Technical Review Committee

Big Darby Accord Advisory Panel

Franklin County

- Franklin County Planning Commission
- Franklin County Zoning Commission
- Board of County Commissioners

Townships

- Prairie Township Zoning Commission
- Brown Township Trustees
- Prairie Township Trustees

Columbus

- Columbus Development Commission
- Council Briefings
- Development Committee – Public Hearing
- City Council Final Action

Prairie Township Zoning Commission & Trustees

The Zoning Commission will be responsible for holding a public hearing on the Darby Town Center Master Plan. Staff will be responsible for notifying affected property owners.

Following the public hearing, the Zoning Commission will be responsible for making a recommendation to the Township Board of Trustees regarding adoption of the Town Center Master Plan.

The Zoning Commission's recommendation will then go to the Trustees for final action.

Preparation for Public Hearing:

Mr. Whyte observed that the Town Center Master Plan is complex and contains new concepts that might not be well understood or wholeheartedly accepted. Therefore, he counseled solid preparation by the Zoning Commission for the public hearing. It is almost a certainty that Township property owners will ask meaningful questions at the public hearing.

Because numerous residents may have the same question, Mr. Whyte suggested that a "Frequently Asked Questions" list be prepared by the Zoning Commission and made available for distribution.

Ms. Swisher asked that the Commission's "Frequently Asked Questions" list be submitted to Tracy Hatmaker, Township administrator, for review prior to handing it out. Every precaution should be taken to ensure that the questions are relevant and the answers correct.

Architectural Standards & Review Board:

Ms. Swisher cautioned the Zoning Commission that decisions about the development of the Town Center cannot be covered by the Township's current zoning code. She foresees the need for specific architectural standards and an architectural review board for the Darby Town Center.

Announcements:

Ms. Swisher stated that she would be on vacation during the May 24th meeting and would not be able to attend.

Mr. Balzer asked Commission members if they wanted to re-schedule the May meeting. In response, the Zoning Commission decided by consensus to hold the meeting on Tuesday, May 17, 2011, at the regular time of 3:00 p.m.

Next Meeting:

Mr. Balzer announced that the next meeting of the Prairie Township Zoning Commission will be Tuesday, May 17, 2011, at 3:00 p.m. at the Township Hall, 23 Maple Drive.

There being no further business before the Prairie Township Zoning Commission, Mr. Balzer adjourned the meeting at 4:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Hulda Moffitt, Secretary

