

Minutes: Russell Township Zoning Commission
Russell Fire-Rescue Station
Special Meeting
January 30, 2012

Present: Richard E. Snyder, Chairman
Bruce Murphy
Donna Weiss Carson
Ben Kotowski
Tom Warren
Diana Steffen, Secretary

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 8:00 p.m., and the Secretary confirmed that a Sunshine Notice announcing this special meeting was sent to four newspapers and posted at the Administration Building on 01/19/12.

The Chairman stated that because the election of 2012 officers was postponed at the 01/25/12 meeting due to his absence, and because Ms. Weiss Carson will be absent from the February meeting, he suggested holding the election tonight with the full board present. The Commission agreed.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS FOR 2012 – *Mr. Murphy moved to open the floor for nominations for Chairman and Vice-Chairman, Mr. Kotowski seconded and the motion passed unanimously.*

Mr. Murphy nominated Mr. Snyder for Chairman, Mr. Kotowski seconded.

Mr. Kotowski nominated Mr. Murphy for Vice-Chairman, Mr. Warren seconded.

Mr. Murphy moved to close the floor for nominations, Mr. Kotowski seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Upon roll call the vote to re-elect Mr. Snyder as Chairman was Mr. Murphy – yes, Ms. Weiss Carson – yes, Mr. Kotowski – yes, Mr. Warren – yes, Mr. Snyder – yes, and the motion passed unanimously.

Upon roll call the vote to re-elect Mr. Murphy as Vice-Chairman was Mr. Murphy – yes, Ms. Weiss Carson – yes, Mr. Kotowski – yes, Mr. Warren – yes, Mr. Snyder – yes, and the motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Snyder was re-elected Chairman for 2012 and Mr. Murphy was re-elected Vice-Chairman for 2012.

PLANNING PROCESS FOR UPDATE OF LAND USE GUIDE PLAN – Mr. Snyder gave an overview of the process used for the update of the current Guide Plan. The purpose is to produce a sound plan with environmental control, defensibility and support for the Zoning Resolution. Both the current plan ("1995 plan") and the 1975 plan demonstrated that the Township residents wished to protect the rural character and natural environment, and the goal now will be to update the 1995 plan rather than create a new plan. The 1995 plan took three years and cost \$80,000, or \$120,000 in today's dollars, and the recommendation at that time was to allow four years for the next update, 2012 to the end of 2015. Mr. Snyder said from speaking with the Trustees individually and the Geauga County Planning Commission, he believed that this update could be completed in two years with a two-year buffer if extra time is required.

Mr. Snyder said that the survey of the residents in the 1995 plan indicated they wished Russell to remain the same, and the findings of the 2010 Geauga County survey echo those findings within the county. With the Township at 80% build out there is not an opportunity for many changes in land use since the remaining growth will be in residential areas. In the Township survey the majority of residents wanted to reinforce the environmental controls to protect the water, since the aquifer is subject to contamination from surface contaminants and depletion. Residents said they wished to maintain the rural character, and since that time the amount of parkland has increased and more land has been preserved in its

natural state. There has been an increase in private land being put into conservation, mostly Lucia Nash's property, but also more public parkland. Residents also said they wanted to protect the environment and natural resources, and the Zoning Commission responded by placing limits on impervious surfaces, implemented storm water management procedures, erosion and sediment control, riparian setbacks and education of the public. Some residents commented that the C-S districts should be limited or decreased in size, that they looked bad, and asked why they cannot be made to look better. The Trustees purchased the BP station and turned it into open land, and demolished the old police station. The Township cannot impose architectural controls over commercial areas, but it was able to rezone most of the publicly-owned land from C-S to O-B, a lower use, and Trustees could negotiate with a potential buyer over the proposed use, using deed restrictions to maintain some architectural control.

Mr. Snyder recommended documenting all the changes he has mentioned into an eight to ten page report with supporting documents to be made available to residents via newspapers, the website and at the Zoning Office, so residents can see that there is a connection between what they asked for and what the Township officials have done over the last 20 years.

Mr. Snyder reviewed the process used for the last update: 1) focus groups whose comments were used to formulate the questions for the survey, 2) a land use survey of residents, 3) hiring of a planner. Mr. Snyder suggested the Commission members review the Guide Plan update files in the Zoning Office, and if anyone has any new ideas they should bring them to the next meeting. He suggested using mostly the same questions in the new survey for a better comparison of opinions, and noted that the Geauga County survey had similar questions. They should hire a market research firm to frame the questions and conduct the survey, and present the analysis and results to the Township.

For the last update data collection and analysis was done by the planner, but Mr. Snyder recommended the Commission handle this and then engage a planner. The Commission should be able to collect information on the census, information from NOACA and ODOT, and use information and maps provided by the Chagrin River Watershed Partners, which is willing to assist with the update. This work could be done in-house while the survey is being conducted, with the Commission working in teams to work more efficiently if needed.

As far as a planner, it is possible the Geauga County Planning Commission might be able to work in that capacity. Mr. Dietrich had suggested the Zoning Commission give him the data and he would respond with one of the following: 1) whether they have the resources and scope within their means to do the work, or 2) if they do not have quite the required resources but could do some of the work and use outside resources too, or 3) if the work would be beyond their scope and capability they would provide names of planners and a scope of work.

Mr. Snyder reiterated that the Commission needs to present a process plan to the Trustees, organize the survey, collect and analyze data and prepare for a planner who will revise the current plan as a draft. The Trustees would like the Commission to make a presentation on the recommended process in March or April.

Mr. Murphy recommended asking legal counsel whether focus groups are necessary prior to conducting the survey, or whether it can be defensible without focus groups. He also said they need to decide whether to put additional questions in the survey. He felt it was very important to have a high level of public participation and communication regarding the Guide Plan and survey, so they would need to educate the residents about the Guide Plan and that a survey would be forthcoming. The Commission discussed publicity that could be used. Mr. Warren suggested asking Mr. Dietrich to give an opinion on whether to have focus groups, and Mr. Snyder said he would discuss the issue with Mr. Dietrich and report back to the Commission. Mr. Kotowski said he felt it was important that everything be in the record, so the reasons for their actions are well documented.

Before agreeing to Mr. Snyder's recommended approach Ms. Weiss Carson said she thought they should obtain the answers from legal counsel and the G.C.P.C. whether focus groups are needed, and the legitimacy of re-using questions from the previous survey. Mr. Warren asked if they should include in the

process a discussion of issues that are outside their control, such as oil and gas. He said such external factors could undermine what the community has worked so hard to put in place. Mr. Murphy suggested such issues could include the state roads and ODOT and NOACA's plans for them. Also mentioned were injection wells and the county's interest in doing studies of the condition of the aquifer, which would depend on residents being willing to have their water tested. It was agreed that they should obtain current water statistics.

Mr. Kotowski mentioned that at the time of the 1995 plan the average house was 34 years old, and there has not been enough new housing in the last 18 years to continue that average. He wondered if housing was now an average of 45 years perhaps, and therefore more subject to blight, tear downs, and more difficult to maintain. Mr. Murphy said it would be important to identify housing that is not being maintained.

Mr. Snyder asked what the Commission wished to do in order to meet the March or April deadline. It was agreed that before that can be answered Mr. Snyder will write up his recommended process in bullet points and email it to the Commission. He will also contact the G.C.P.C. and Sheila Salem. Mr. Murphy has drafted a scope of work that he will email to Mr. Snyder. Members asked to present the process plan at the second Trustees' meeting in April. Mr. Snyder said he is willing to get the update work started but will need help from everyone on the Commission.

Action Items: Mr. Snyder to write up a plan for the process with a timeframe and email it to everyone, and write to Mr. Dietrich and Ms. Salem. Mr. Murphy to send his draft scope of work to Mr. Snyder. Entire Commission will review the process plan and contact Mr. Snyder regarding whether to schedule an extra February meeting. Members to review the files for the last Guide Plan at the Zoning Office.

There being no other business Mr. Murphy moved to adjourn, Mr. Kotowski seconded and the meeting adjourned at 9:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Steffen
Secretary

Date

Richard E. Snyder
Chairman

Date