

**PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE  
CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF GRAND RAPIDS  
Minutes of the August 26, 2008 Meeting**

A regular meeting of the Planning Commission of Grand Rapids Charter Township was held at the Township Hall on Tuesday, July 22, 2008 at 7:00 p.m.

Present were Chair Susan Molhoek, Vice-chair Stephen C. Fry, Secretary Wayne Harrall, Commissioners Edward J. Robinette, David VanDyke, Michael J Fuller, and Beverly Wall. Also present were Township Planning Director Richard Sprague Jr and Planning/Zoning Clerical Assistant Robin Rothley.

**1. Approve minutes of the regular meeting of July 22, 2008.**

The Planning Commissioners listed the following corrections to the July 22, 2008 minutes:

- Dave VanDyke was not absent.
- Page 3, eighth paragraph; “seamed” should be “seemed”.
- Page 3, ninth paragraph, “responsibility of” should be placed between “the” and “Township Engineer”.
- Page 4, third paragraph; “change” ” should be “changed”

**Wayne Harrall**, seconded by **Edward Robinette**, moved to approve the minutes with the above mentioned changes. **Motion passed unanimously.**

**2. Public Hearing – Catholic Secondary Schools Special Land Use.**

Peter Baldwin, A.M.D.G Architects., presented the request. They have been working closely with Township Planning Director Rick Sprague, neighbors, and area businesses on this project. They have been before the Zoning Board of Appeals requesting variances for setbacks along Knapp and the expressway and also for Light pole heights.

The Zoning Board of Appeals members questioned the need to construct a football stadium in this location. Mr. Baldwin introduced Steve Passinault, Principal of Catholic Central High School, to explain the need.

Steve Passinault gave a brief history of Catholic Central High School; it is the oldest Catholic School in the United States.

They realize that the original agreement when the facility was approved that they would not hold Varsity Football or Varsity Basketball games on the site. Circumstances have changed now that they have joined the OK Conference; Varsity games are no longer allowed on Saturday. Catholic Central has had a long standing agreement with the Grand Rapids City League to share Houseman Field for home games; now with the new rules Grand Rapids Public Schools will be

using the field every Friday night. Consequently Catholic Central now needs to construct a football stadium for their home games and they are hoping to put it on this site.

They are also seeking approval to host Varsity Basketball games; they have not included this on their application. They have no plans at this time to play games in the new Field House but would like that option in the future without being required to come back for approval.

They will do everything in their power to be good neighbors.

The fence along I-96 will be replaced with a taller fence which will help collect trash blowing out and prevent spectators from trying to access the field that way.

Peter Baldwin said they are requesting to amend their existing Special Land Use to allow Varsity Basketball and Football, setbacks, and increased height for the stadium lighting.

They have spoken with neighbors and have been given a list of concerns; traffic, parking, hours of operation, sound and lighting, trash, landscaping buffer, gates being secured after hours.

They believe the land use fits in with zoning. It is a unique site with I-96 on one side and Knapp on another. They are asking for a 25' setback from I-96 and 72.6' setback from Knapp.

They chose the North West corner for a variety of reasons. It is located near existing parking and locker rooms, borders the expressway and Knapp so it will have the least impact to the neighbors, there is a vacant lot across Knapp that they have an agreement with New Life Christian Church to use as an overflow parking area and a soccer field.

There will be a landscape buffer along Knapp and Leffingwell in hopes of blocking light from the neighbor's homes. They're not sure of the exact design at this time.

Peter Baldwin reviewed average attendance. It is unknown how attendance will be now that they are changing leagues.

They have agreements with New Life Christian Fellowship, Knapp Charter School, and Kent Intermediate School District (KISD) for off site parking for the occasional Big Game. The proposed parking will be:

- On site 508
- New Life Christian Fellowship 560
- Knapp Charter School 110
- KISD 418
- Total 1,596

Because the proposed parking at New Life Christian Fellowship would be used infrequently they would like to keep it as a green space and have lawn parking.

They have been in discussion with Kent County Sheriff Department regarding traffic and pedestrian flow before and after events. There will be officers directing traffic on Knapp and Leffingwell and there will also be people directing traffic in the parking lots.

Sue Molhoek asked who would pay for the additional Sheriff coverage and if there would be No Parking signs placed along Leffingwell to prevent people from parking on the street. Peter

Baldwin said that the school will be paying the cost of the Sheriffs. They don't believe just signs will prevent people from parking on the street along Leffingwell; they do plan to be pro-active and are deciding the best way to handle that situation.

Mark Wrona, AMDG Architect, discussed the proposed lighting. The Zoning Ordinance does not address athletic lighting; probably because public schools are not required to come to the local municipalities for approval. They are requesting four 90' light poles on the field; technology has improved lighting glare. He presented a photometrics plan which showed minimal light onto Knapp Street. They have submitted this plan with Kent County Road Commission and Michigan Department of Transportation and each have filed a letter indicating they have no concerns with light spillage.

They have built the same stadium at Grand Rapids Christian High School, Mark Wrona showed a picture of that stadium with the lights on and they cut off almost immediately off the field. A letter from Catherine LaLonde; Georgetown Association President, a neighborhood adjacent to the GR Christian field; stating their original concerns about the field have been alleviated since the field was constructed.

The major goal is to concentrate sound by using several smaller speakers rather than a few large ones. This will prevent the sound from carrying loudly to the neighborhood.

Peter Baldwin said that the complex will be closed by 11:00 p.m. every night and the gates will be locked.

They agree to fencing to help with litter issues.

Peter Baldwin said that Township Engineers Moore & Bruggink, Ink has signed off on the technical side.

Ten years ago they sincerely asked for a practice facility but their circumstances have changed and now they are asking for this amendment.

Township Planning Director, Rick Sprague, outlined his staff report.

Safety is a concern with the Township. He and the Township Engineer have suggested the applicant consider a tunnel under Knapp St to lessen the possibility of a car versus pedestrian accident.

When KISD parking is used there would need to be additional directions for people walking to the stadium.

The Township asked Progressive Engineering to review the project to determine if a detailed traffic study should be required. Peter LeMourie said that because it the events would be so sporadic and held after peak traffic hours he didn't feel a full study would be needed.

The proposed height and style of fencing should be noted on the plans. He would encourage the Planning Commission to approve a taller fence along the west edge to keep people out of the MDOT right of way.

Steve Fry asked if the lot at New Life would be paved and lighted. Peter Baldwin said that they discussed the options and had decided the few times a year it would be used for parking they plan to not pave it. They will put lights for the soccer field.

Sue Molhoek read letters from several residents to be included in the minutes for public comment.

- Jim Vidro, 3153 Wildridge, in support.
- Mike Campbell, 309 Edgehill, in support.
- Rick Billings, 2622 Deli Ct, in support.
- Katherine LaLonde, Georgetown Association President, in support.
- Quentin and Amie Scott, 1874 Leffingwell, opposed.

Steve Fry, seconded by Wayne Harrall moved to open the Public Hearing at 8:00 p.m.. Motion passed unanimously.

Dave Kubiak, 1768 Leffingwell, discussed what was promised ten years ago and he feels the school had this planned all along.

He had many questions and concerns:

- Lacrosse and soccer were not included in the application; these would also be played under the lights.
- Will the facilities be able to be leased to others?
- Blowing trash is already an issue and it will only get worse with this request.
- Current traffic is a problem and will get worse with this added traffic as well as other projects coming to the area.
- The requested light poles are nearly three times what is allowed in the ordinance.
- There will also be parking lot lights and the grass parking lot across Knapp will also need to be lit.
- He can see no pros for the neighbors with this request.

Etta Denbesten, 1904 Leffingwell, agreed with Dave Kubiak. She feels the neighbors were lied to. Basketball traffic was not mentioned and will add to the existing problems.

She is opposed.

Judy Frantz, 2558 Knapp, said she understands her neighbors concerns but she feels they have been addressed.

She is in favor of the change.

John Kennedy, 4610 Bradford, said he was part of the original design group ten years ago and if they had planned back then to have the stadium at this site they would not have built the facility as they have. They would have left a reasonable space for the stadium. They believed they would be able to stay at Houseman Field indefinitely.

He is in support of the change.

Nancy White, 2940 Knapp, has lived in her home since 1959 and has seen many changes.

She addressed some issues:

- Added traffic is what we get with progress.
- Trash does blow into her yard; she picks it up.
- Lighting brings security; she can see what is happening in her yard and neighborhood.
- The bus runs near the site so people could take the bus to games as well

Rev. Lonnie Shields, New Life Christian Fellowship, believes it is our responsibility to give the next generation every opportunity to build character.

He is in support of the project.

Tom Conrad, Board Member for New Life Christian Fellowship, has worked with parking for 20 years. People must be willing to work together; multi-use shared parking benefits everyone.

Mark Rasmussen, 2490 Greenings, is in favor of the change. He feels it would be great for the community.

As there was no one else in the audience wishing to comment; Steve Fry, seconded by Mike Fuller to close the Public Hearing at 8:16 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

Wayne Harrall discussed other uses for the field.

Steve Fry was concerned with the hours of operation; 11:00 p.m. should be a reasonable time to close.

Wayne Harrall said that fencing should be placed around the football field to contain trash. Mark Wrona said a six foot fence will be placed in a way to catch trash.

Wayne Harrall suggested pedestrian traffic going under Knapp along the expressway. He gave an example of the M-6 corridor walkways.

Mark Wrona said they would be willing to look at that and also the tunnel under Knapp when road work is done.

Steve Fry asked about ball protection. Mark Wrona said that a netting system is indicated on the site plan.

Dave VanDyke asked why the applicant had not gone before the Planning Commission when the field house was constructed. Steve Passinault said that the building was on the original approval in 1997.

Wayne Harrall asked about the parking lot lighting. Mark Wrona said that they did not put the existing parking lot lights on the plan. The height of those is 30' which is what was approved in 1997. The height of lights helps create less spill.

Mike Fuller asked how KISD is being used. Mark Wrona explained access to KISD with current paths. They will work with KISD to access to prevent trespass.

Steve Fry is not comfortable with traffic, it should be sent to Site Plan Review Committee. He suggested that other Planning Commission members be invited as well.

Ed Robinette said they are trying to put too much in a space that doesn't fit. The field doesn't fit with the parking.

Wayne Harrall agrees with the green parking; the investment protects "Green Space" for the Township.

Dave VanDyke does believe it was originally intended for a practice field and circumstances have changed for them. He remembers the original approval; had it been proposed as a stadium with varsity sports it would not likely have been approved.

Bev Wall agreed that they are trying to fit too much on the site. She questioned if alternative options have been explored. She would be in opposition at this time.

Steve Fry has no problem with the setback requests; this would be the best place they could put it. He has no problem with the lighting; four poles are better than many shorter ones.

Steve Fry likes the idea of the Green parking strategy. From a property rights standpoint he can't find a reason to oppose the project. There are still many details that would have to be worked out.

Mike Fuller said it would be a degradation to the neighbors along Leffingwell. Parking spread around also is not favorable.

Wayne Harrall pointed out that he did not see a lot of opposition; two neighbors were in the audience and one letter was presented. Because the remaining residents have not been heard from they are unsure how they feel.

Dave VanDyke said he agrees with property owner right but he would have a hard time voting for this request. He knows the promises made with the original approval; the neighbors put their trust in the Planning Commission to protect their interests.

Peter Baldwin said that they have met with the neighbors on the North West corner of Knapp and Leffingwell and they had mentioned concerns with traffic and trash. There had been an offer to purchase that property but they were unable to reach an agreement.

**Steve Fry**, seconded by **Wayne Harrall**, moved to approve the amendment to the Special Land Use for setbacks along I-96 and Knapp St. and lighting as shown on site plan dated 7/15/2008 with the following conditions.

- Include comments by Township Engineer.
- Fencing height, trash, and any additional concerns will be handled by Site Plan Review Committee. This meeting will be open to other Planning Commission members.
- Recommendation by Progressive AE for traffic Analysis
- Site Plan Review Committee will review the paved/unpaved parking area across Knapp St., access to and from KISD and landscaping plans.
- The hours of operation will remain per the original approval.

**Yes: Steve Fry, Wayne Harrall, Sue Molhoek**

**No: Mike Fuller, Ed Robinette, Dave VanDyke, Bev Wall**

**Motion Denied.**

**3. Public Hearing – SBA Towers II Communication Tower Special Land Use request.**

Mike Fuller excused himself from this request.

Anthony Amien, project manager, presented the request.

- There is an existing tower on the site so they are not asking for a new tower in a residential neighborhood. The tower was standing before the surrounding homes were built.
- The property is owned by the State.
- Co-location is not possible on the existing tower.
- Personal Property will be taxed.

They have been in discussion with staff and it was suggested that they contact the neighbors to inform them of the request. Anthony Amien went door to door in the neighborhood on August 13, 2008, and spoke with several neighbors. He felt that he was able to alleviate many of their concerns.

A major safety concern was the distance to the nearest neighbors and the height of the monopole. A letter was submitted from the manufacturer of the pole to address concerns with safety. The monopole is designed to collapse and bend over 1/3 of height. They are willing to work with staff to come up with a suitable proposal. SBA would be responsible for any and all repairs for damages caused by the tower.

They plan to remove the least amount of vegetation as possible and will work closely with staff for landscaping. They plan to have a slated fence along with current vegetations.

The applicant has mailed letters to other carriers notifying them of the ability to handle other carriers. T-Mobile is the only one that has responded.

Anthony Amien discussed coverage maps, propagation, a study done by T-Mobile, and the locations of other towers.

Wayne Harrall noted the existing tower is 146 feet and they are proposing a 190 foot tower. Anthony Amien explained that they want to be able to fit as many carriers on the pole as possible so they won't require a second pole.

Dave VanDyke asked if they plan to stay on the pole located approximately three miles from this one. Anthony Amien said they do plan stay with both; peoples needs have changed. He discussed changing needs and how the cell business needs to keep up.

Township Planning Director, Rick Sprague, outlined his staff report.

- The site is surrounded by residential.
- The site is overgrown now with an 18' tree up the center of the existing pole.
- Once the project is complete what will remain on the site.
- Suggest a written agreement as to who pays for improvements and repairs to the driveway during and pose construction.
- Easements must be granted for access.
- He is in favor of co-location; not sure of the need.

Andrew Felde, Township Wireless Consultant, has reviewed the coverage maps provided. He would need more time and information from the applicant to study the need for another tower in this location and give a full report.

He discussed other towers in the vicinity; based on information it appears T-Mobile can meet capacity and coverage for the area with current towers.

Rick Sprague explained that the township has required one building to house all co-location equipment for all providers. This building would have to be aesthetic for the neighborhood.

Steve Fry, seconded by Wayne Harrall moved to open the Public Hearing at 9:40 p.m.. Motion passed unanimously.

Jean Laxton, 2843 Big Timber Dr, will be speaking on behalf of Tom Moore, 2845 Big Timber Dr, as well. He is out of town so is unable to attend this meeting.

They have a shared drive that is difficult to maneuver because of a sharp curve and close trees. Moving vans and snow plows are unable to make the turn so they're unsure how a crane is expected to make it.

They believed the cell tower use would not continue because the existing tower has been unoperational for the last two years.

Tree removal is going to change the look of their property.

Could radiation be a safety concern?

Todd Hanson, 2340 Waterford Way, is the Treasurer of the Association Board. He doesn't feel a 200' tower belongs in the middle of a residential neighborhood.

He has spoken with many of his neighbors that did not receive a notice for this request. They have not seen the new plans and have incomplete information.

Property values are a concern.

He discussed road maintenance, the storage building, the need for a generator, and the proposed slated fence.

He submitted a petition signed by 47 homeowners in opposition of the tower.

Sue Molhoek asked if there were fire hydrants in the development. She was told that there are hydrants on the main road but not on the private road leading to the tower site.

Mike Skwarda, 2823 Big Timber Dr, is the President of the Board for the Homeowners Association. He concurs with what has been said by the others.

The existing tower is unseen; it's so overgrown. The road leading to the site is effectively a driveway.

The project does not fit in the middle of a neighborhood.

Ron Shroeder, 2231 Waterford Way, works in the cellular business. He is not here to represent the cellular business and would like his neighbors to be informed. Neighbor concerns should be addressed before a decision is made.

Wireless brings value to the community for police, fire, ambulance, school bus, etc. The next generation of cellular will be more efficient for more than just cell phones.

Marty Weinberg, 2892 Ellington Rd; not opposed to cellular towers. He is opposed to the tower for property values. He is an appraiser by trade and believes the tower would lower values.

Anthony Amien addressed some of the neighbor concerns.

- They would be willing to provide a lattice tower if it would be more fitting for the neighborhood.
- According to a T-Mobile article property values are not negatively impacted by a cell tower.
- Each provider will maintain their own service area each month. They will access the site in a SUV type vehicle.
- Cannot regulate towers based on radiation concerns.
- He is willing to meet with Mr. Sprague and Mr. Felde to provide any information needed.

Steve Fry asked about if there have been responses to the eleven notices sent to providers and if any public agencies would be using the tower. Anthony Amien said that T-Mobile gave a positive response; Clearwire and Metro PCS also expressed interest. The State will always have the right to use the tower according to their contract.

As there was no one else in the audience wishing to comment; Wayne Harrall, seconded by Mike Fuller to close the Public Hearing at 10:07 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

**Ed Robinette**, seconded by **Bev Wall**, moved table the request to give the applicant time to provide further information. Information needed:

- Plans for an equipment building.
- Landscaping plans.
- Plans of how the shared driveway will be utilized.
- Provide an easement for the drive.
- Provide a propagation study.
- Consultant study – 170' tall tower?

Wayne Harrall requested a visual of the lattice style pole.

**Motion Passed Unanimously.**

**4. Update from Township Planning Director.**

Rick Sprague gave an update of the upcoming September and October agendas.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:20 p.m.

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Wayne A. Harrall – Secretary