



CITY OF OTSEGO

117 E. ORLEANS ST. OTSEGO, MI 49078

269-692-3391

269-692-2643 (F)

WWW.CITYOFOTSEGO.ORG

PLANNING COMMISSION 2020 SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

Executive Summary

2020 put unprecedented stress and changes on everyone in so many unpredictable ways. The Planning Commission were not exempt from those effects. COVID came in and changed everyone's schedules in relation to development across the city. Starting in March the State of Michigan put limitations on meetings as we all tried to figure out how we are expected to operate amidst a pandemic. The Planning Commission was left with the inability to safely and legally hold public meetings to conduct business. So there was an initial cancelation of meetings until virtual meetings became an option. Even after the harsh lockdowns of the spring were initially lifted, the health status of the region dictated whether we held meetings or not throughout the rest of the year. COVID impact was felt throughout the year not only in logistical efforts but also with the private sector applications. All of the Site Plans presented were all projects that were years in the making and I believe we would have received additional Site Plans if COVID never occurred. I would also like to add that I am proud of the manner we conducted our business. We were able to meet when needed and accomplish our goals while taking the appropriate precautions and keeping an open mind on how to make all of this happen. Here's to hoping 2021 is completely different.

Extended Education

In February I was able to attend the *Michigan State University Extension Zoning Administration Certificate Program*. This was a 3 day training event that was located in Petoskey. It offers in depth instruction from experienced zoning officials that cover all things Zoning Administrator related. After the program I successfully passed the tests and received my Zoning Administrator Certificate in March. The MSUE ZAC is the only certification or professional development that is available for Zoning Administrators. It is not mandatory for a Zoning Administrator to have a certificate, but I am confident the City of Otsego will be in a better place now that I do have a more thorough understanding of my duties as the Zoning Administrator. The City liability insurance carrier reimbursed the costs of the certificate.

Site Plan Applications

FEMA- FEMA presented a Site Plan for a large 40,000 sq. ft. industrial facility on Washington St. It is the 1st of 5 phases of development. This application was resubmitted from the 2014 Site Plan that went without being built. FEMA is excited to come to Otsego and setup their 2nd location with big ambitions for the future. The Site Plan was rather straight forward and the finished product is a welcomed addition to the area.

Main Street/DDA Community Pavilion- This was rather unique because this was obviously presented by the Main Street/DDA Board. So an arm of the City and it was a little murky about whether Site Plan approval was needed or not. In hopes of transparency and equality we decided to go through the full Site Plan approval process, identical to any other private applicant. This pavilion is located along the Kalamazoo River at the end of Fair St. behind the police station. It is the first project within the Kalamazoo River Master Plan. The reason the pavilion was chosen was the anticipation of the pavilion drawing people to the riverfront. It is large at 100' X 72'. It will be the home for the Farmer's Market and the Ice Rink along with many other uses by residents and visitors. The pavilion's vision included being rented out for birthday parties, weddings and showers. The location is ideally situated on a hill to garner attention from drivers along Farmer St. That and the location right next to the kayak launch; it is expected to get a lot of use by the community. The biggest question going forward will be the parking lot. That will be done, however it will depend on the money left over after the project is completed. It may take place in either '21 or '22.

USG- Otsego Paper Reject Handling Building- USG added a Rejects Handling Building to the south side of their facility on N. Farmer St. The Site Plan includes a 4,560 sq. ft. building addition as well as 6,140 sq. ft. of asphalt and 1,050 sq. ft. of concrete. The Site Plan was approved pending a variance being granted for a building height of 53' which was 3' higher than the zoning ordinance allows. The ZBA would shortly after grant the variance. The application was also pending that USG complied with all EGLE requirements in relation to storm water being sent to the Kalamazoo River. The addition is tucked away in between the existing building and the Kalamazoo River. The finished product will create a more pleasing appearance by taking some of the operations indoors and out of site from others. This is the second phase of USG's improvements in Otsego in the last 2 years. The international corporation have made significant investments in the Otsego plant and it should cement their vision of maximizing the facility for years to come here in Otsego.

Text Amendments

Attached Garages- Single Family Residential- This amendment added some regulations on the eligible size of attached garages for single family residential properties. The reason for the regulation is that there is little to no regulation that limits the size of an attached garage. There are limitations on sizes of detached accessory buildings, but prior to this amendment there was nothing limiting attached accessory buildings. The limitations included in this amendment are based on the size of a single family residence. For all residences up to 1,300 sq. ft. of living space are allowed an attached accessory building (garage) up to 832 sq. ft.. For every additional 5 sq. ft. of living space, the homeowner is allowed an additional foot of attached accessory building space. So if a home of 1,700 sq. ft. is built they could have an attached garage of 912 sq. ft. ($1,700-1,300=400/5=80$, $832+80=912$). This amendment also established some definitions that clarify what actual living space is. It must be finished area that is not used for storage or a bathroom. This will be tracked through assessing records and building permits. If someone makes an argument that they possess more living space than our records show. That will be corrected and they will then be taxed on it going forward. This will prevent one from making false claims about living space. One thing to remember is that this standard will only apply to new permits. Those garages that are already built, will not need to meet these specifications.

ZBA Meetings

1036 Barton St. - A new home owner applied for a variance to have a substantially larger detached accessory building than what is allowed under our ZO. The legal size could be up to 960 sq. ft. with a lot of this size. The applicant wanted to build a 1,536 sq. ft. building. That is a significant variance and there were no real hardships offered. The owner just wanted a larger building than the ZO allowed to store multiple vehicles and trailers. Multiple neighbors voiced their opinions in letters and speeches given at the meeting against the application. There is also a historic backdrop of strict adherence of the ZO throughout Ely Acres, considering the City was instrumental in the development of that neighborhood. The application was denied.

320 N. Farmer St. - This application was presented by USG. They submitted plans for a significant investment in their facility with a Site Plan. The development included the housing of their rejected product. Currently these activities reside outside. So it would be best for all involved to take this process inside and out of the public vision. Their building permit application included a building height of 53', when our ZO allows only 50' in General Industrial. The variance application is for those 3' difference. USG made a compelling case with the fact this height is in fact required, due to the existing manufacturing infrastructure that is already built on the property. The height applied for is what is needed to continue to conduct their business. Another piece of relative information is that this development would be attached to a building that is 75' high and there are smoke stacks on the parcel that is 150' high. Considering these details, this application was approved. This application was pending from the Planning Commission's Site Plan approval motion.

Respectfully Submitted,

Aaron Mitchell
Zoning Administrator/City Manager