

**ACME TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
M-72 CORRIDOR ORDINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE
ACME TOWNSHIP HALL
6042 Acme Road, Williamsburg MI 49690
3:30 p.m. Wednesday, June 2, 2004**

Meeting called to Order at 3:30 p.m.

Members present: D. Hoxsie, D. Krause, H. Smith
Members excused: P. Salathiel
Staff present: S. Corpe, Recording Secretary
D. Connors – R. Clark Associates, Consultant

1. Old Business:

- a) **Discussion** regarding draft of proposed M-72 Corridor Overlay District right-of-way buffer landscaping requirements: Dean Connors presented his first draft of the plan. Krause has already suggested some modifications. Connors perceived that we were looking for a very natural approach to corridor landscaping, but also recognizing that business owners along the corridor will want some manicured areas. He assumed that these rules would apply to all new developments and significant modifications to currently developed properties requiring site plan review. He included stormwater detention within landscaping buffer areas, but with the requirement that suitable plantings be installed. He would like to provide some sort of incentive for preservation of existing large trees. Hoxsie asked if all large trees would be desirable to be maintained, or if some would be required to be removed. Krause responded that point 2 requires that “existing quality and healthy vegetation shall be preserved...” So, older trees with broken limbs might be required to be removed. Connors provided a requirement that no more than 40% of the total landscaping area be in maintained lawn, so as to avoid a modern shopping mall look.

In all instances, there will be at least 50’ from this landscape buffer area to the nearest point of a building that will have additional landscaping, as well as eventual service drives.

Item #4 speaks to the number of required trees per 200’ stretch of road frontage. Smith asked if a reference to the required minimum caliper size is required; Krause noted that this is accomplished on page 2 with the requirement that the general standards of Section 7.5.6 be met. Connors also provided a list of recommended plants. Hoxsie likes this aspect, as it can remove potential questions from the minds of developers seeking to use the ordinance.

Item #6 requires earth berms with specific dimensional requirements. He included a minimum 3’ height requirement, but is unsure that this is a good idea. If there is very little room near a sidewalk or service drive, it might be difficult at best to achieve the required slope and height. Hoxsie asked if anyone besides himself feels that berms look artificial and contrived. Krause made a point of looking at the roadside while he drove along M-72 the other day, and he actually feels that there are few areas where a berm would make sense. Hoxsie noted that the requirements include mention of “where significant landforms don’t already exist” which may meet our needs. Connors suggested changing the “shall” into a “may” to make berming optional. Given the option, few may choose to construct berms, as they would represent additional expense.

Item #7 discusses sidewalks. He allowed for either asphalt or concrete construction, but was unsure what the township would desire. The group felt that for the sake of uniformity and aesthetics, asphalt should be required. The required width will be 6'.

Connors borrowed the final paragraph in the narrative from the City of Traverse City. It is intended to provide flexibility in case a plan comes in that's deemed better than the standards without fitting them. Different land uses are likely to engender different approaches to landscaping, and individual site conditions will also have an impact. Smith asked about situations where properties cross Acme or Yuba Creeks. Connors responded that walkway crossings over creeks would be necessary. In wetland areas such as exist on the Meijer property, it could be tricky. These challenges will also be faced by engineers during any eventual widening of M-72. It would be good to build in flexibility to grant a waiver of the pathway requirement in extraordinary circumstances. Hoxsie noted that in the case of Meijer, perhaps a little more flexibility and creativity is what would be necessary to solve the problem.

Krause suggested a bullet point specifying that maintenance of the buffer area is the responsibility of the landowner.

Turning to the recommended plants list, Connors created divisions based on salt-tolerance characteristics. He feels it's not strictly necessary to do it this way, as any qualified landscaper should be aware of this factor, but it might be helpful. The goal is to avoid planting materials in places where they have little realistic chance of survival. Krause suggested that this list may be too extensive, providing too many choices that will result in a more disjointed overall appearance. Narrowing the choices might be beneficial to both applicant and township. Hoxsie asked if we would want to see the same six types of trees all along the corridor; Connors and Krause mentioned that there is currently little diversity in the area, so narrowing the choices would closely mimic natural conditions. Connors is seeking to avoid use of non-native species as much as possible.

Connors presented three different drawings representing possible options for meeting the landscaping requirements. Smith asked if Krause has come up with a design for the islands/medians in divided driveways. He has not, and replied that in some cases the area might be too small for meaningful landscaping. What is possible would be highly circumstantial, and he feels it should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. All of the three scenarios employ clear vision areas. All include some lawn and some natural areas with preserved native vegetation. To some extent, conditions on neighboring properties or beyond the 50' buffer area will dictate the design of the buffer area.

Krause had some general suggestions for improvements on the draft. His key point: the more simplified the better. He would prefer more trees and less shrubs to take into account "speed scale." At 55 m.p.h. the smaller plantings won't really be noticed; the bigger the better to soften the look. He provided a revised draft that is more basic. He simplified the plant list down to 3-6 of the most recognizable of each general type of tree plus shrubs. His draft also provides that the same species of tree will be used within each grouping. There could be several groupings, each containing a different species, but there would be no mixing. This is how clumps of trees are most likely to occur in nature.

Connors stated that Krause also suggested keeping the retention basins outside of the buffer area. Krause is concerned that if they are within the buffer area they will either

be a series of tiny basins or will take over the entire buffer area. Again, he views this as a matter of simplicity. Connors asked if he could envision that on some properties the buffer might be the most appropriate place for a retention basin; Krause said he did not. Hoxsie feels there could be some occasions, but his bigger concern is that a number of projects that have been reviewed and approved contain buildings so large in relation to the parcel of land that the landscaping can't be squeezed in and the basins are pushed to the right-of-way. This could be one way to help control overbuilding of parcels. Krause proposed a scenario where a retention basin in the area between the buffer and the structure might be permitted to blend into the buffer area to a small extent, but it should be on an exception basis. Hoxsie mentioned, as an M-72 landowner, that the requirements already in place are taking a large portion of available land, and the kind of basin placement being contemplated takes yet more.

It was agreed that Connors will take Krause's contribution back and incorporate it into a revised draft. Krause also suggested that one scenario drawing is sufficient rather than three. Hoxsie approves of brevity, but also wants to ensure that the interpretation and application will truly be as we wish it to be. He suggested that we look at the plan from the development perspective, looking for "loopholes." Krause is confident that he has covered this perspective, having worked primarily for developers. Corpe suggested that the second draft be run past John Hull to see if he will have any questions from the enforcement perspective. Smith concurred that brevity is usually best.

Connors feels he will be able to provide another draft next week. The next meeting was set for Thursday, June 10 at 3:30 p.m.

2. Other Business: None

3. Public Comment: None

Meeting adjourned at 4:30 p.m.