

**OSHTEMO CHARTER TOWNSHIP
DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING HELD DECEMBER 12, 2012

The Oshtemo Charter Township Downtown Development Authority (DDA) Board of Directors held a special meeting on Wednesday, December 12, 2012. The meeting was called to order at approximately 12:07 p.m. at the Oshtemo Community Center at 6407 Parkview Avenue.

Members of the Board of Directors present: Chairperson Bruce Betzler, Kathleen Garland-Rike, Jay Brown, Libby Heiny-Cogswell (arrived at 12:40 p.m.), Michael Lutke, Fred Gould, Jack Siegel, Andy Wenzel, Terry Schley, and Chip Everett.

Members of the Board of Directors absent: Glenn Steeg and Stephen Dallas.

Also present were Mike Seelye, Patricia Williams, Wyatt Vondran, and Gregory Milliken, Planning Director.

Introduction & Purpose

Chairperson Betzler called the meeting to order at 12:07 p.m. and introduced himself to the guests. He explained the purpose of the Downtown Development Authority and its role in the Village area.

Chairperson Betzler indicated that the purpose of the special meeting was to discuss a potential rear access drive to be constructed by the DDA behind properties fronting on the east side of 9th Street south of Stadium Drive in order to improve access and safety of ingress and egress for residents, customers, property owners, and employees. He indicated this is a very busy area and circulation is challenging. He said that the DDA has been working on this for a while and would like to present some proposals to property owners for consideration and feedback today.

Before continuing, the property owners in attendance as well as the DDA members introduced themselves.

Background

Mr. Schley presented additional background information on the project and how the DDA arrived at this point in the project. He indicated that the idea of improving access to properties on 9th Street has been discussed for years. The current motivation started building in late 2011 due to new projects and interests coming in the DDA area, such as the Streetscape project that was getting off the ground. Conflicts occur often and congested areas have a history of providing rear access to alleviate such situations. It was a general, conceptual idea that needed further development.

Mr. Schley indicated that after analyzing the situation, the DDA determined that it was willing to make a capital improvement to ease the circulation issues in this area. The improvement would not be a full-fledged street but a service drive for access. The thought was that with a parcel of Township-owned land behind, it would provide a location for such a drive.

Mr. Schley stated that representatives from the DDA met with the Township Board to discuss the idea with them in February. The response from the Board was to first check with the property owners to see if the owners would be willing to have the drive on their property.

Mr. Schley distributed three alternative arrangements for the proposed service drive. Alternative 1 showed the drive completely on private property. He indicated that at a minimum, the DDA needs to have a response to the Board regarding the property owners' thoughts on Alternative 1. Alternative 2 showed the drive split between public and private land. Alternative 3 showed the drive completely on Township property.

The members in attendance discussed the variety of possibilities for longer term improvements including a signal at Atlantic and a public road connecting Atlantic and Parkview. Mr. Schley agreed there are improvements needed and many great ideas, but all will take a significant amount of time. The purpose of the service drive is to provide a quicker, less expensive response to the on-going issues of access, safety, circulation, etc.

The DDA agreed that there is merit in rear access drive for the purpose of businesses having another way to get customers in and out of their sites. Another goal is to enhance development opportunities by providing improved access.

Mr. Schley indicated that a dialogue is needed and that the DDA desires this to be a partnership between the DDA, property owners, and the Township.

Ms. Williams asked for more information as to why the Township Board wanted the driveway to be located on private property.

Mr. Schley indicated that there are some on the Board that believe that when the Township owns property it is for the greater good and not just to be used for the benefit of a few.

Ms. Williams stated that the Township property behind the Community Center has historically not been a property that could be enjoyed by all. She said a letter was sent by the Township about a year ago harshly stating that neighbors could not use the land in the manner that we had been using it.

Mr. Schley stated there were a lot of different ideas but the DDA was clearly told to get input from owners about putting the drive on their land before returning to Board.

Ms. Williams said she is very interested in this idea and invested in this project.

Mr. Vondran asked why the drive would not be a regular road that is maintained and built to road standards.

Mr. Schley said the DDA is willing to make the investment and put in a service drive that can withstand truck traffic and be maintained in the winter. However, he indicated that no one is sure this is the right long-term solution. At some point in the future, a better solution may emerge that will be the long-term answer, and this will then go away. Until then, a 24 foot service drive seems like a good temporary solution.

Mr. Seelye confirmed this would be like a service drive.

Mr. Schley agreed.

Mr. Vondran stated it would be like the road behind Walgreen's across from Walmart. He thought that was a handy system.

Mr. Schley said details like lighting have not been addressed yet. It should be safe, but it is not envisioned as someplace to be attractive for cars to cut through.

Ms. Williams indicated that she believes this drive will raise taxes and result in a loss of land area for property owners. She wondered why a traffic light at Atlantic is not being considered instead. She indicated that the rear access drive would not relieve traffic but instead push it down the block; a left turn onto 9th Street would still be challenging whether it is made from a driveway or Atlantic.

Mr. Schley reminded everyone that the DDA does not have authority over the roads. They are the jurisdiction of the Kalamazoo County Road Commission.

Ms. Heiny-Cogswell arrived at 12:40 p.m.

Ms. Williams stated that there was a meeting a while ago about the Village area, and she wondered what has happened as a result of those conversations. She said she does not support the road. She thinks there are other alternatives that would be a better use of money. She wondered how this would promote or impede larger development. She thinks a new vision should be considered and the Village idea should be abandoned.

Mr. Lutke indicated he is a business owner on 9th Street, and he has seen the area grow considerably. The drive is very important to promote business growth. Shoppers figure out how to get into places. He stated that he stops traffic on 9th Street three times a week with semi-trucks.

Ms. Williams asked if the nature of Mr. Lutke's business was really appropriate for a Village setting.

Mr. Lutke stated that his 9th Street facility is primarily a retail and sales office. He operates a shop and storage yard elsewhere to accommodate the larger trucks and materials. He indicated it is therefore very appropriate.

Mr. Vondran asked about temporary use of the land to the east as a drive as was done in the past when there was a two-track there.

Mr. Lutke stated when construction was being done on 9th Street, he had permission to put in a gravel drive and connect it to the south end of the Community Center parking lot to access Parkview. He indicated it was phenomenal for access and safety purposes both for customers and employees.

Mr. Siegel stated that he also has trouble with semi trucks and this drive will be good for his business.

Mr. Brown asked what type of business would establish these days that does not require some form of truck delivery.

Mr. Schley stated that he would like to focus the discussion on the rear access drive. The DDA can evaluate the focus of the Village Area at some point in the future, but the DDA's charge is to arrive at consensus on whether the drive is to be located on private property or not. Representatives of the DDA are going to attend the January 8 work session of the Township Board and will need to be able to respond to that question.

Mr. Seelye stated that Mr. Siegel's development is a real problem getting in and out of and that any new development today is served by a ring road or service drive. He stated that a street light at Atlantic would be beneficial.

Ms. Williams asked about sidewalks and pedestrian safety. She stated that nothing is happening in the Village area.

Mr. Vondran stated that he has had his house on the market a few times, and one of the consistent concerns raised is congestion.

Mr. Wenzel asked if there had been a study done for a traffic signal.

Mr. Schley said that he did not believe a signal at Atlantic was on the Road Commission's radar. But he indicated that the DDA and KATS were going to be doing a study of traffic and circulation in the Village area but stated that implementation was not a fast moving process.

Mr. Seelye indicated that he thought the drive would result in a lot of traffic through the community center property.

Mr. Schley responded saying that the arrangement would not allow for that.

Mr. Lutke said that of all the proposals, the Township has the land available to do something. He prefers Alternative 3 with the understanding that the rear portions of the private property will be used for parking and drainage. He stated that the access road is fantastic; a good first step.

Mr. Seelye said that if a developer were to come in and develop this whole area in a coordinated fashion, they would be required to put in a service drive of some type, and it would be required on their property.

Ms. Williams stated that her property does not go deep enough to touch the Township property, so she wondered how she would access the driveway.

Mr. Schley stated that a lot of great points were being raised, and that the DDA did not have answers for all of them. He said that what he did know is that the group can sit around and wait for the perfect solution, or it can take action on a temporary basis to make improvements to the situation now.

Mr. Seelye pointed out that a major property owner, Mehdi Purazrang, was absent.

Chairperson Betzler indicated that Mr. Purazrang was contacted in the same manner as everyone else and that he had tried to stop by and see Mr. Purazrang before the meeting. However, there was no success in reaching him.

Ms. Williams left the meeting at approximately 1:00 p.m.

Mr. Seelye stated that he is not affected, but he thinks the service drive is a good idea and that property values will only increase as a result. He understands concerns about giving up property for this. He indicated he sees some merit in Alternative #2 where the drive is shared.

Mr. Siegel stated he likes Alternative #3 because it does not involve giving up property.

Mr. Schley cautioned the Board members about the importance of working together as partners.

Mr. Lutke stated that he is working on plans to upgrade his building and has been working with the new Code and trying to fit the standards. If he complies, he indicated that it will highly limit his ability to get semi trucks into the site. Also taking 24 feet off the back of the property impacts his drainage area and limits potential expansion in the future.

Mr. Vondran asked if in the interim until this is done, it would be possible to restore the two-track drive or something similar like they used to have across the Township land.

Mr. Schley said that could be asked.

Mr. Brown said that he does not own property along there. He stated that the Township property is about 129 feet wide. Therefore, they would still have over 100 feet of width if the road is built there. He sees the Road on Township property as a win-win.

Mr. Schley asked Ms. Heiny-Cogswell if there were any plans for the use of the property.

Ms. Heiny-Cogswell stated there were no plans for the use of the property. There was a sentiment that public land should not just be given away.

Mr. Seelye asked about the status of the two-track on the property.

Mr. Lutke stated that when construction ended on 9th Street, permission to use the property to the east was revoked.

Mr. Schley asked for some consensus from the property owners present as to the project and the alternatives that were present. It was the consensus of the property owners present that the proposed access drive was a good idea and worth pursuing. It was also the consensus of the property owners present that the proposed drive should be on Township land and not located on their private property.

Mr. Seelye asked if the drive would be in setback areas if it were on private property.

Mr. Schley indicated that even if the building could not be located there, parking, drainage, and other site improvements would likely be located in this area (and could be) as they are pushed to the rear of the site and the building is pushed forward.

Mr. Seelye stated that it appears unanimous that the opinion is to have an access drive and put it on the Township property.

Mr. Schley said to Chairman Betzler that one of them will need to get Mr. Purazrang's opinion before the Board meeting.

Announcements and Adjournment

Hearing no other questions or comments and having exhausted the agenda, Chairperson Betzler adjourned the meeting at 1:25 p.m.

Oshtemo Charter Township
Downtown Development Authority

Minutes Prepared: December 13, 2012
Minutes Approved: January 16, 2013