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Supervisor Pat Hohl Clerk Mike Dolan Treasurer Jason Negri Trustees Bill Hahn, Patricia Hughes, Chuck Menzies, Cindy Michniewicz

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## PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

Wednesday, March 19, 2025 at 7:00 PM

Hamburg Township Hall Board Room

### MINUTES

#### CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Muck called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

#### PLEDGE TO THE FLAG

#### ROLL CALL OF THE BOARD:

1) **PRESENT:**

John Hamlin  
Patricia Hughes  
Deborah Mariani  
Ron Muir  
Jeff Muck, Chair  
Joyce Priebe

2) **ABSENT:**

Victor Leabu Jr

#### APPROVAL OF MEETING AGENDA for tonight.

**Approval Motion** made by Commissioner Mariani, seconded by Commissioner Muir, to approve the agenda as presented.

#### **VOTE: MOTION CARRIED**

#### APPROVAL OF THE MEETING MINUTES

Commissioner Hamlin asked a few clarifying questions about page 3 of February 19, 2025, Meeting Minutes. The Planning Commission had a small discussion, but no changes were suggested. Trustee Hughes requested a copy of

the PC Boards By-Laws from David. Commissioners Muir and Hamlin stated that the meeting minutes were good and that the person typing them up had been doing a good job. Commissioner Mariani said it was Lisa who was video recording the meeting. They thanked Lisa.

**Approval Motion** made by Commissioner Mariani, seconded by Commissioner Priebe, to approve February 19, 2025, Planning Commission Meeting Minutes as presented.

**VOTE: MOTION CARRIED**

**CALL TO THE PUBLIC-** No public response

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### **1. Planning Commission's 5-year Review of the Master Plan.**

Chair Muck opened the public hearing to David. David stated that this is the Planning and Enabling Act's 5-year statutory review of the Township's Master or Comprehensive Plan. Since last month's PC meeting, everyone has submitted comments about this plan so tonight we could formally discuss these points and decide if we are going to open this for a formal amendment with a noticing process. We can also decide that it is a viable Master Plan that doesn't require any significant or major changes. All the PC members submitted comments so David compiled them together in his report so each commissioner could discuss their comments openly with the group. We can resolve the issues at tonight's meeting or continue to discuss these topics at future meetings. It is all up to the commissioners.

Chair Muck asked how these comments would be documented and saved for future staff who might be hired into David's position, at point that Commissioners might decide that they want to make a formal amendment to the Master Plan. He stated that he knew that these comments would be housed in the PC meeting minutes but he wanted to ensure that they could be easily assessable to future administrative staff if the need arises in about 5-10 years. The minutes would be the official record of the meeting of these comments. David stated that he could create a separate document that could be saved in a folder of the past Master Plan Review Meetings. He would note what the PC had concern topic comments about in the master plan. These comments would not be stored in a publicly accessible area on the website where the notes would be stored. These comments would be kept in our administrative internal hard drive where future staff could access these reviews.

Chair Muck then turned the meeting over to PC Board. Commissioner Muir wanted to clarify the boundary of Hall Road in the Master Plan where it is shown as extending further east than it does on Map 2 in the Village Center Plan. He continued to share his concern about this current presidential administration federal budget cuts on pharmacy/ medical and the Post Office spending might impact CVS and the local post office off M-36. Our whole Village Center Area Development plan might be impacted by these cuts and effect this area's development for the future. He continued to discuss that the sewer and water connections are going is in the farming rustic areas where they want to preserve. Commissioner Mariani asked Commissioner Muir what he would recommend that they do in this economy. Muir said it was a marketing issue. He stated that the future land use designation should not

limit the development of a possible empty store such as Rite Aid from being made into a local restaurant in the future. She asked David how CVS was zoned. He said it was zoned as Village Center, and restaurants would be allowed there in the future if proposed. David said that the question is could those buildings be retrofitted into such a use, with ample parking, area for a drive through and a fire suppression system. Commissioner Hamlin asked if Commissioner Muir was thinking that our world economics might change our local economy and business development of this area. Commissioner Muir explained that with the post office losing money, more post office locations might be closed. Commissioner Mariani said the administration might privatize the post office business instead of having government workers manage this work.

Trustee Hughes stated that we shouldn't make any rash decisions on the Master Plan but proposed that the PC wait a few years before formally amending this plan. She said that these administrative changes might only occur for a short time and then something else might change the economy a few years down the road. She asked David if there were any rules against the PC waiting for a year before amending the Master Plan. David said the only rule was that the PC must do a statutory 5-year review of the Comprehensive Plan. He said that communities are welcome to do this annually, and they can make changes to their area plans to adjust to how quickly their community changes. Commissioner Muir stated that restaurant development is on the decline right now because they have been struggling with keeping hired staff available to work since COVID. Trustee Hughes stated that many people can't afford to eat out.

Commissioner Mariani said that she had questions for Victor on his comment to describe our open space ordinance. She felt that maybe this was discussed prior to her becoming a commissioner. She recognized that Commissioner Priebe has been a commissioner for many years and that she might have something to say about this issue. Chair Muck said that Commissioner Leabu is very proud of the uniqueness of our open space ordinance for our community. David said that all townships are required by the Michigan Planning & Enabling Act to provide a form of open space communities. Everyone has a different take on what open space is. David said that we could use our open space communities to the public on our Planning & Zoning webpage. Putting it out there might help residents and developers know what is available in our community. Chair Muck agreed that we should be more transparent, and we need to do a better job of sharing our open space areas with the community so they can be more aware of it. David said that staff can create a separate page that will highlight the benefits of our open space communities. Commissioner Priebe mentioned that the audience provides feedback and comments during their meetings about the density issues with incoming developments. Priebe shared that it would be advantageous to share why the VC has a higher development density for development and what the trade off is for having such dense areas in our community. Commissioner Mariani asked Commissioner Priebe what Commissioner Leabu meant by updating existing land use conditions. She asked David if he knew what Commissioner Leabu meant. He said that he did not know. Commissioner Priebe said it is like what she had said earlier about mentioning the changes with the Freedom River development from what it was to what it is now, as well as the areas on Hall Road. It would be helpful to show that this area is shown as residential in the Master Plan but currently it is general industrial. Priebe said she thinks it will stay more industrial due to the existing commercial locations in this area still. The Master Plan needs to be realistic with the unchanging industrial nature of this area, as we get new development proposals for this area.

Trustee Hughes mentioned that Commissioner Mariana and herself were enrolled in the Michigan State University's Master Citizen Planner Class. She said that she is learning that you need to have a Zoning District Map that follows your ordinance and the Future Zoning map that is part of your Master Plan which are different. She seemed confused and was requesting the assistance of David to clarify these points for her. David clarified that the Future Land Use Map is the implementation of the Master Plan of what the community will look like in the future. Each section of the Master Plan provides a rationale for how a certain area of the community will be developed and whether it will be residential or industrial. David said that the reason that the Future Map from the Master Plan shows the Hall Road area to be residential is because of the Village Center Area Plan. We will examine this smaller plan in more detail in the next few months. This plan allows the Township a lot of flexibility. It could allow a developer to come in and propose a storage unit easily on the brownfield site with minimal requirements because it is still zoned Industrial. A residential developer could remediate the area for some kind of housing development because the use complies with our future land use map that shows the area as Residential. The minute you rezone something; you can take a whole set of uses out of our decision making. Trustee Hughes said that she read the whole Master Plan but by the time she finished reading it, she couldn't tell if she found what she was looking for. She was looking for some text to explain the difference between the current zoning map and the future zoning map. David clarified the difference between these two maps is based on the Village Center detailed area plan, which is a subplan. Many communities do not have a large difference between their Zoning Map and their Future Zoning Map like us. The VC plan envisions high density in this small area downtown on Hall Rd. He said that is why it is important that we spend some time digging into the VC area plan to ensure that it makes sense or if there are changes that need to be made to it. We need to examine if this is a logical way to develop the core of Hamburg Township.

Commissioner Hamlin mentioned that the Township had hired a planner to create the Village Center Area Plan, but it never came to anyone's attention until a developer came proposing to put in a residential community. Hamlin said that this planner had forcefully pushed this area plan on to the Planning Commissioners, telling them that it had to be residential. As a Planning Administrator, Hamlin said that he was always told to provide information and never to force his opinions onto the serving bodies in the municipalities that he served. There was much contention due to the situation. Despite what the planner said, there was a great deal of industrial in the area despite his push for the future to target residential uses for the area. Hamlin stated that having a storage unit there wasn't such a bad idea for the area. Hamlin said that his comments stated that the area's land uses should be flexible between the residential and industrial uses, but never rigid.

David said that if the PC wants to zone a certain area of the township for a specific use, then they need to initiate the rezoning process. If you want to leave something zoned industrial, that is fine. But when a developer proposes something with that use, then they can't say no, we have allotted this area for residential, then the township is obligated to go through the rezoning process to rectify this situation. The PC needs to allow the proposal to move forward since it meets the zoning regulations. If that area was supposed to be reserved for residential, then it is the responsibility of the PC to officially go through the rezoning process to change this area to residential.

Commissioner Mariani asked if the PC rezoned the area to residential, and a developer proposed a storage facility, would it be difficult to go back to the general industrial zoning. David said yes, it would be difficult to justify since the residential rezoning matches our future land use map for the Master Plan.

Someone could say that the township was flipflopping and spot zoning in this area. Commissioner Priebe said that she wouldn't want to rezone this area from industrial to residential because it would limit what the property owner could propose to the PC. Trustee Hughes said that she couldn't piece together these plans especially where it mentioned sidewalks being built along Hall and Hamburg Roads to access the Lakeland Trails. Then she asked what we envisioned the open fields turning into near the CVS area. David said that he met with some developers this week who are proposing different residential communities (single family homes, apartments and town homes) for the two open fields along M36. The street layout is envisioned by the Village Center Area Plan and had a very descriptive vision for the township. David said he was unsure if it is practical or unrealistic right now. He said that is why he feels the PC needs to take their time and review this area plan. Trustee Hughes mentioned that as she read the Master Plan of 2020, it mentions keeping these large fields as open space and green belts, so the township has a rural feeling. She supports not allowing these lots along M36 to be overly developed because it would change the feel of this community. She stated that the ordinance requires that developers don't clear wetlands and some of the natural features of the community. Hughes said she didn't understand how forceful they could be regarding this issue. Commissioner Muir said that there aren't many trees or natural features in those fields since they are abandoned farm fields that were cleared for farming.

Hamlin said that when the PC doesn't follow the rules of the zoning ordinance and the Master Plan when reviewing a developer's proposal, then they are not preserving the natural features of the community, such as the forests in the VC area. Hamlin continued with his comments. He said that there were some updates that were needed to the demographic section of the Master Plan. Hamlin asked David if he would update the facts of the Master Plan. David said that the housing has changed a little bit, but the population of Hamburg has not. Hamlin said that the Echo ordinance needed to be updated in the Master Plan. He also said that the missing middle housing and the work/force housing is missing from Hamburg Township. Hamlin said this type of housing is missing from our housing stock for young millennials who are trying to afford to purchase a home today. Hamlin said it would be good to encourage owner-occupancy by providing bonuses to developers. Requiring development agreements that promoted owner-occupied housing in the community would ensure that investors couldn't buy up everything and then they rent everything. Hamlin said that the transportation section of the Master Plan needed to include more about mass transit options available to parents. Public school bussing is better and safer rather household car transport of students to and from school. When parents drive their children to school, it is very disruptive to the township traffic patterns. Hamlin mentioned that the downtown Howell utilized three story buildings which were attractive. Hamlin agreed that three story apartments would make sense in Hamburg if it was done away from single residential homes and kept from abutting M-36. He said that the BOCA allows for 3 story homes and buildings now. We should reexamine this element in our zoning ordinance, but we shouldn't up the developer's density allowance if they utilized such three-story buildings. David said he doesn't have an issue with a three-story building if the PC and Township Board wanted to approve them. Chair Muck agreed as well. David said that the Village Center is a prime area for the missing middle housing since there is a lot of land there. David said there is political will with the Trustees to allow this type of housing. The Master Plan envisions this type of mixed-development housing. Hamlin asked if we must formally amend the Master Plan and have a public hearing. Hamlin continued to ask if this must be recommended to the Township Board, and they approve it. David said no, this is purely statutory and held by the Planning Commission. David said then they would be good for 5 years. David said if they had to rewrite the Master Plan then they would have to have a formal noticed public hearing and then the board would have to approve it. The few things

that we have made comments on during this meeting, such as the ECHO, will be noted in tonight's meeting notes.

Trustee Hughes said that she went to the class covering the Michigan Planning and Enabling Act. She read the act, word for word, so she could make sure we did not need to notice and have a public hearing on these small changes to the Master Plan. Commissioner Mariani replied that is why these changes are only being noted in the notes and that the PC is not rewriting the actual Master Plan. Trustee Hughes said that they should wait until residents start moving into the downtown apartments before they make any changes, since the PC will have to change the demographics of the Master Plan. The PC discussed that 2030 might be the perfect time to do administer these changes through the 18-month process. David recommended making some amendments in 2025 or 2027. Amendments help to keep the Master Plan current.

Trustee Hughes asked if Hamburg Township will ever have complete streets. She asked how they would be paid for, then she stated the Livingston County Road Commission might charge the residents for creating them. She said that during the charettes people mentioned that they wanted to be able to access the Lakeland Trail from their home, which is too difficult since we are all sprawled out. David said that this wasn't a probability everywhere in Hamburg Township, but it is more possible in the Village Center area plan. The whole area needs some street scaping to beautify it and attract people to this area. Hughes then talked about the natural features concepts. She talked about the possibility of restricting the number of people that put in their boats to access the water ways. She said it all is conventionalized, and that the PC hasn't institutionalized these natural feature concepts.

Chair Muck asked the commissioners if anyone else had any further comments or questions. Muck then reclarified that nothing tonight would change the Master Plan. In the upcoming months, the PC would review the Village Center Area Plan, and if some amendment changes were needed to that plan, then the PC would have to notice a public hearing. PC recommendations would need to go up to the Township Board for approval. David said he would not recommend making the VC Master Plan a 12–16-month process. Since all members will not be able to make the April PC meeting, David recommended not meeting until May 2025. David asked if the VC Area Plan should be shrunk down. Chair Muck asked if David could come up with 5 professional talking points regarding the Village Center Master Plan to keep everyone on task. The group came up with these 5 points, as a recommendation.

1. Hall Road- this is what is coming in
2. Shrink size of Area Plan
3. Complete Streets
4. Historic District
5. Three-story

Commissioner Hamlin mentioned that when the Village Center Area Plan was formulated and charettes were held, many residents were shocked by the density requirements for the area development in the plan. Commissioner Mariani asked David if townships ever give incentives to encourage developers to build things that are documented in the Master Plan. David said yes. The townships that own property can be more aggressive and directly market what they expect from the developer. She continued to ask David if the township has ever pursued purchasing any of the old worn-out buildings in the Village Center due to blight and safety issues. David said that Pat Hohl has experience in this area. Cities are very proactive in snapping up areas for conservation easements and green belts to protect them from development, but that is ultimately a policy issue. Commissioner Hamlin said that could help to direct

the right kind of development. Chair Muck said that is what happened with Hampton Manor by CVS. The homeowner was delinquent on their property taxes, but the township purchased the land for \$1. The township actively wanted a senior facility to be built there. Commissioner Priebe said the township did a Request for Proposal for this development. Commissioner Muir said that the property would have to be in foreclosure or condemned for unsafety. Priebe continued to state that the Village Center was more vibrant when the Township Hall and the Hamburg Library were located down there. There was more of a draw and the Food Center was open. The old fire house is a museum now.

Trustee Hughes asked what they were going to do about parking downtown if the Village Center Plan began to work. The Hamburg Pub parking area is terrible. Commissioner Hamlin asked if all the Commissioners could get a copy of this documentation.

**Approval motion** made by Commissioner Hamlin, seconded by Commissioner Priebe, per the statutory requirements of the Michigan Planning and Zoning Enabling Act, the Planning Commission has fulfilled its 5-year review of the Master Plan, deciding not to amend it at this time.

**VOTE: MOTION CARRIED**

## **ZONING ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT**

David thanked everyone for their thoughtful comments. He also reminded the PC that the next meeting will be on May 21, 2025. Chair Muck asked the group to get their Main Topic Bullet Points to David before the next meeting. David will send everyone a digital copy of the list before that May Meeting.

Our township engineer and a photometric engineer will go out to Nick Zander's building this week to ensure the lights meet our lighting specifications. David will let everyone know what is found. If the building does not meet our requirements, then the Livingston County Building Department and our Zoning Department will not give them a Certificate of Occupancy until they do meet our requirements. They will have to install the awnings over the patios.

The Gas Station Retail Center has just received its water connection and today they were doing some bulldozing.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**Approval motion** by Commissioner Priebe, seconded by Trustee Hughes, to adjourn at 8:02 pm.

**VOTE: MOTION CARRIED.**

Respectfully submitted,

**Lisa Perschke**

*Planning/Zoning Coordinator & Recording Secretary*

**David Rohr**

*Planning & Zoning Director*

The minutes were approved as presented/corrected: \_\_\_\_\_

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Commissioner Jeff Muck, Chairperson