

MEMO

Date: March 28, 2013

To: Alexandria Town Board

From: Ben Oleson, Hometown Planning
Zoning Administrator, Alexandria Township

Re: Zoning Administrator's Report

Dear Town Board Members:

The Planning Commission held its regular meeting on March 25, 2013. There were no public hearings, so the Commission spent its time discussing a number of possible ordinance updates. A brief summary of those discussions is as follows:

1. Updating variance criteria to match with 2011 changes made by the State Legislature. The Township had discussed this in 2011, but decided to wait until Douglas County updated its ordinances so that if the County added any variance criteria beyond what the state requires, we would be consistent. The County has not yet updated their ordinance, but has indicated to Staff that they may try to do so at the same time they update their sign ordinance (tentatively late April/early May 2013). The Commission decided to continue to wait for the County.
2. A discussion of vacation rental regulations (rental of single-family homes - usually lake homes - for nightly or weekly occupancy). Again, the Commission had discussed this previously when Staff was receiving questions as to whether these were allowed in the Township. The Commission decided to wait to take any action as the State Legislature was considering legislation affecting local government's ability to regulate such uses (the proposed legislation would have required them to be allowed, but would have allowed for regulation of certain aspects of these uses). The State Legislature never passed any legislation and it does not appear to be on their radar during this legislative session. The Commission asked that Staff include this issue in future discussions on ordinance updates (there appeared to be a general agreement that such uses are essentially commercial in nature and should be regulated in some manner).
3. There was discussion regarding the recently adopted "small animal" ordinance regulating the keeping of chickens, ducks, etc... on lots under 5 acres. Staff has had several people express frustration both with 1) the limit of three chickens allowed and 2) the cost of an interim use permit application (\$400) that effectively serves to make it not worth trying to raise chickens.

The Commission felt the fee should not be changed due to the fixed public hearing costs, but did feel that some “tweaks” could be made to the ordinance to make it more reflective of the township desires (such as prohibiting small animals on lots less than one acre, and allowing small animals on lots 1-5 acres that differs in the number allowed based on the type of animal). The Commission directed Staff to propose some edits at a future meeting.

4. The Commission discussed the interim use permit application fee (\$400) for all types of interim uses and felt the fee should not be changed due to the fixed public hearing costs involved.
5. There was discussion regarding the Township’s use of interim uses (allows for time limits to be imposed) vs. conditional use permits (no time limits can be imposed). Staff was directed to review the list of uses allowed by IUP vs CUP and see if any changes would be suggested.
6. There was discussion about the limitation of detached accessory buildings to 1500 sq ft total on shoreland lots when such lots are tied to an adjacent, working farm. The Commission felt this situation occurred so little, that there was no need to try and amend any ordinances. The fact that such a change would also likely require the County to change its ordinance was another factor in this decision.
7. There was discussion about some interest throughout the state in reducing any local barriers that might exist to the installation of solar panels on homes or residential properties. Staff was directed to review the ordinance and see where such barriers might exist and bring this back for further discussion.
8. The Commission discussed the issue of invasive species (i.e. zebra mussels, curly leaf pondweed, etc..) and felt that the Township should make some effort on its website to educate residents about the problem and what they can do to prevent it. Hometown Planning has edited its website to provide a link to the DNR website regarding invasive species, but there was a feeling on the Commission that the Township website should have a direct link as well.
9. Staff provided an update on the status of the County’s sign ordinance update process. A revised draft based on stakeholder input is being worked on and the County is tentatively planning for a late-April public hearing. If the Township wants to provide formal comments during that public hearing, it will likely need to do so via the next Planning Commission meeting or via the Town Board. Staff will be distributing copies of the final draft going to public hearing once it is available.
10. Continued training on Comprehensive Plan development was tabled due to the length of the meeting.

If you have questions or concerns on the items in this report or any other issues, please do not hesitate to contact us. You can reach me by email at oleson@hometownplanning.com or by phone at 888-439-9793.

Sincerely,

HOMETOWN PLANNING

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben Oleson', written over a faint rectangular stamp or box.

Ben Oleson
Planning and Zoning Administrator