
ALEXANDRIA TOWNSHIP

PLANNING COMMISSION

MEETING PACKET FOR
September 22, 2014



PRELIMINARY AGENDA
Alexandria Township Planning Commission
September 22, 2014
6:00 p.m. – Township Conference Room

Call to Order

Adopt Agenda

Approve Minutes

February 14, 2014 – site visit (no quorum)

August 25, 2014 – regular meeting

Public Hearing

1. None

Zoning Administrator's Report

New Business:

Old Business:

1. Discussion – Comprehensive Plan Update

Adjournment

**NOTE: This is a preliminary agenda, subject to change at any time.

STAFF REPORT

Issue: Discussion - Comprehensive Plan Update

Agenda Item: Old Business - 1

Background: At the July and August 2014 meetings, the Commission discussed that it would like to begin reviewing Section IV of the 2007 Comprehensive Plan. The Township Board has previously directed the Planning Commission to review the Plan for what it feels to be necessary or desired updates.

A copy of Section IV of the current Plan is attached, for your review.

IV. Issues & Trends

Early in the Comprehensive Planning process, township officials, residents and property owners within the Township developed and refined statements about the primary issues facing the Township in each of four topic areas – land use, public infrastructure and services, parks and recreation, and governance. A summary of the issues and trends identified in each of these areas is provided in this section.

Land Use

Agriculture

- International, national and regional trends in the agricultural economy and in land prices have contributed to the loss of some farms and the consolidation of others. These trends are beyond the ability of the Township and individual farmers to control. While many farmers will continue to operate successfully within the Township, this broader trend will continue.
- Population growth in the Alexandria Lakes area, and throughout Alexandria Township, has increased the demand for new development. Such new development results in the conversion of productive farmland, wildlife habitat, and scenic open space to urban uses and is a trend that is likely to continue.
- High densities of non-farm development, and particularly residential development, present an inherent conflict with intense agricultural activities. Development patterns that mix the two uses often results in conflict between property owners, unnecessary expenditures to mitigate the conflicts, and lowered property values for both uses.
- Despite the economic challenges within the agricultural economy nationwide and the pressures to convert agricultural land to non-farm uses, agriculture remains a valuable part of the local economy and contributes to the rural character of the Township. Many local farmers are adapting to these challenges and have been able to continue operating successfully.



Housing Development

- There has been a strong demand for new housing over the last several years as the population of the Alexandria Lakes Area has grown. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of households in the Township increased by 374 homes and the population increased by 746 people. This trend is expected to continue due to the Township's proximity to the City of Alexandria, the relatively strong employment opportunities in the area, and the scenic amenities in the region, although the net impact on the Township will be affected by annexation (see below).
- Due to the orderly annexation agreement reached in 2002 with the City of Alexandria, the number of households and people in the Township has decreased. According to estimates from the State, the number of households in the Township dropped by about 100 and the population decreased by about 400 people between 2000 and 2004. Further household and



Alexandria Township



population reductions will occur in 2006, 2009 and 2012 as the annexation plan is implemented.

- The Township is part of a larger, regional housing market that has a need for a variety of types, sizes, and costs of housing as well as diversity in neighborhood designs and amenities.
- The continued economic viability of the Alexandria Lakes Area depends, in part, on the availability of housing that is affordable and meets the needs of all residents and workers in the area as they move through the various life stages.
- Zoning regulations, subdivision design standards, investments in roads, parks and trails, and other public investments play a significant role in determining the designs of neighborhoods, the types and cost of housing available, and the efficiency with which they can be served with public infrastructure and services.



- As the population of the Township and the larger region grows there will be a need to plan for the expansion of central sewer and water infrastructure. It is anticipated that the current areas identified for annexation into the City of Alexandria or within the ALASD boundaries will accommodate this growth for the next twenty years or more, but that current lot size and lot width requirements could make further expansion of central sewer and water impractical or excessively costly.
- New housing developments create the potential for significant public safety and quality of life concerns within and outside of the development area if not

thoughtfully designed and constructed. These concerns include flooding from inadequate drainage controls, poor access for emergency service vehicles due to inadequate snow removal or disconnected street patterns, and dangerous traffic conditions for both vehicles and pedestrians.

- New housing developments create demands for additional public services, such as road construction and maintenance, snow removal, public sewer or water, public safety services, parks and trails and others.
- A number of Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) with lakeshore access have been proposed and approved in recent years. The intent of the regulations applicable to these developments is to allow greater flexibility in lot layout and size, encourage a variety of subdivision designs throughout the community, create significant open spaces, and preserve sensitive or unique environmental features. In return, the developer may be allowed a higher number of lots than they would be in a standard “lot/block” subdivision. In practice however, the result of these subdivisions has tended to be higher density without the provision of significant open space or preservation of sensitive and unique environmental features.
- Several recently approved Planned Unit Developments have presented other concerns, including the construction of private roads with inadequate widths to ensure public safety, lack of on-street parking, inappropriate housing densities and locations for common docks, and inadequate planning for stormwater management to protect property and lake water quality.
- As lakeshore property has become increasingly scarce and private lakeshore access has become limited, there has been an increased demand for second- and third-tier lots with a common lake access area to serve these “back lots.” Such practices can help to increase property values and tax revenues, but also have the potential to degrade sensitive shoreland, increase surface water degradation from runoff, and create safety concerns.

Commercial/Industrial Development

- The Township is part of a larger, regional economic market that has a need for a variety of commercial and industrial businesses. The Township benefits from increased business activity in other communities within the region, just as those communities benefit from increased business activity in Alexandria Township.
- There is likely to be a demand for additional commercial and light industrial development within the Township. Such uses create special concerns related to traffic flow and safety, visual appearance, noise, glare and other nuisance characteristics.
- Commercial and industrial development often conflicts with residential uses and should be located in areas where these conflicts can be eliminated or minimized. Heavy industrial development generating odors, heavy traffic, noise and other significant nuisances are particularly incompatible with residential uses.
- Supporting small, home-based businesses can have a positive effect on the local economy, but must not create traffic, noise, odor, pollution or other nuisances inconsistent with residential areas.
- There are certain commercial “adult use” businesses that have a harmful impact on surrounding property values, frequently become places of criminality, and which have objectionable characteristics, particularly when located in close proximity to areas which the youth of the community may frequent, such as churches, parks, schools, and residential areas.



Infrastructure & Public Services

- The increasing population of the Township requires that additional infrastructure and services be provided to its residents and businesses.
- The pattern and location of different types of development (residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, etc...) has a significant impact on the cost of providing public infrastructure and services and ultimately the tax burden necessary for their provision. Policies and regulations that promote the efficient use of existing infrastructure before major investments in new infrastructure results in a lower tax burden for landowners within the Township
- That zoning regulations, subdivision design standards, the pattern of land uses and various public policies play a significant role in determining how efficiently public infrastructure and services can be provided.
- The Township is part of a larger, regional network of infrastructure and public services. The quality of this network of roads, sewage treatment, public water supply and public facilities plays an essential role in the continued economic stability of the larger region. Coordination with other townships, the Cities of Alexandria and Nelson, Douglas County, the Minnesota Department of



Alexandria Township



Transportation and ALASD is required to ensure future investments are adequate and efficient.

- Several significant community assets currently located in the City of Alexandria have been discussed as needing to relocate in the near future – including the airport, the County Fairgrounds, the County Jail, and Jefferson High School.
- Several transportation investments may occur at the County or State level that would have a significant impact on the amount and type of traffic in Alexandria Township. These could include the construction of a new freeway entrance/exit on I-94, the relocation of the Alexandria Airport, or the construction of a light rail line along the Central Lakes Trail.



Parks & Recreation

- Parks, trails, and other recreational opportunities add to the value of property, can help to improve the health of residents and visitors, and contribute to the overall quality of life of Township residents.
- Douglas County has recently adopted a “Park Dedication” ordinance requiring the dedication of land or donation of monies to create or expand parks. This ordinance provides an opportunity for the Township, in coordination with Douglas County, to create new parks and trails in the Township.
- A coordinated network of parks and trails provides greater value to the community than “island” parks that are disconnected from each other.
- Acquisition of land to create parks and trails is much more orderly, efficient and practical at the time of subdivision, than after a subdivision is approved.

Governance

- Alexandria Township has recently adopted an Orderly Annexation Agreement with the City of Alexandria that allows for identified portions of the Township to be annexed into the City on a scheduled basis. To facilitate the regulation development in areas not yet annexed, the City and Township have formed a Joint Planning Board for the regulation of land uses.
- Alexandria Township has the authority to adopt and enforce a variety of general and specific regulations, as authorized in various sections of Minnesota State Statutes. The Township has acted upon this authority by adopting several ordinances related to the general welfare of the Township.
- Among the regulations the Township is authorized to adopt and enforce are ordinances related to planning and zoning that include the authority to regulate the physical development of the town. Presently, Alexandria Township has not adopted any zoning ordinances and is subject to the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances of Douglas County.
- Alexandria Township does have the opportunity to provide input into zoning and subdivision decisions made by Douglas County. While the Township has taken advantage of this opportunity many times in the past, the County may or may not choose to make decisions consistent with Township recommendations.
- In the course of reviewing various zoning and subdivision decisions made by the County in the past, Alexandria Township has found several areas of concern where existing County regulations are insufficient or contradictory to the wishes of the Township. Current areas of concern include inadequate permanent stormwater controls in new subdivisions; the failure to require preliminary grading plans which reveal the transformation of topography affecting drainage patterns; the improper handling of variances; and the approval of conditional use permits allowing for

Comprehensive Plan

inappropriate mixing of residential, commercial, and industrial uses; the acceptance of incomplete applications; the approval of residential subdivisions (including Planned Unit Developments) in unsuitable locations or with inappropriate densities; the allowance of roads with inadequate widths to ensure public safety and which do not accommodate on-street parking within Planned Unit Developments; inconsistent enforcement of regulations; inadequate inspection of road, stormwater, and other improvements; and the inadequate provision of parks and trails to serve existing neighborhoods or new subdivisions.

