
ALEXANDRIA TOWNSHIP

PLANNING COMMISSION

MEETING PACKET FOR
March 25, 2013



PRELIMINARY AGENDA
Alexandria Township Planning Commission
March 25, 2013
6:00 p.m. – Township Conference Room

Call to Order

Adopt Agenda

Welcome New Member – Billie Dropik

Approve Minutes – February 25, 2013

Public Hearing

1. None

Zoning Administrator's Report

New Business:

1. Ordinance Updates – variance criteria to comply with statutory amendments, sign ordinance, other possible/desired amendments

Old Business:

1. Sign Ordinance Status Update – waiting for new Douglas County draft
2. (continued) Training – Developing Effective Comprehensive Plans
3. Discussion – Comprehensive Plan Update

Adjournment

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



STAFF REPORT

Issue: Ordinance updates

Agenda Item: New Business - 1

Background: Typically, at the end of every calendar year, Staff brings a list of “clean-up” ordinance amendments for discussion by the Planning Commission. At the end of 2012, the Township did make changes to the septic system regulations as required by state law.

At the end of 2011 and into 2012, the Township wrote new ordinance sections regarding the regulation of small animals and beekeeping.

Possible Updates - Previously Discussed

Also at the end of 2011, Staff raised the prospect of several other ordinance amendments that were never acted on. These included:

1. Amending the criteria required to obtain a variance. The need for this change results from a 2011 change to state law that made the variance criteria for cities, townships and counties consistent. At the time it was discussed, it was determined that the Township would wait for Douglas County to make its changes in case they added any additional requirements to the minimum required by the state. That way, the Township (which has to be as restrictive as the County by state law) could avoid having to make the changes twice.

Staff has talked with Douglas County about their timeline to make the changes. They have indicated they will likely be seeking to make the changes at the same time as the sign ordinance changes (tentatively late April 2013). They also noted that they may propose a few additional criteria beyond those required by the state.

Staff would recommend we wait until after the County makes their changes before making our own. If it turns out the County adoption is delayed significantly, we can revisit this issue.

2. Creating an ordinance regulating “vacation rental” of single-family homes - particularly around lakeshore. Due to the fact that legislation was being proposed in 2012 that would affect local government’s ability to regulate this use, the Commission decided to hold off on making any changes.

A review of the status of those bills shows that it has not yet been acted on by the full Legislature. Staff is checking with the League of MN Cities (which was opposed to the legislation) about whether this bill is likely to be heard in the current session (there do not appear to be any current bills regarding vacation rentals from a search on the Legislatures’ website).

If the Minnesota Legislature no longer appears to be proposing regulations (or restrictions on local regulations), the Township could consider whether it wants to regulate vacation rentals in any manner.

Possible Updates - To Be Discussed

Over the course of the last year or so, a number of issues have arisen that Staff feels are worth discussion. These include:

1. Concerns regarding the recently adopted “small animal” ordinance - particularly in relation to the limits on the number of chickens that may be raised in a residential neighborhood. The concerns are:
 - a. That the limit of three chickens is overly restrictive; and
 - b. That the requirement for an interim use permit, with the associated \$400 application fee, makes it very unlikely that anyone would ever find it worth it to try and raise chickens on their residential property. In effect, the way it is regulated now means that raising chickens on a small residential property is not allowed.

At the time the current regulations were adopted, there was a general feeling that the Township should err on the side of being more restrictive than less. The question before the Commission now would be whether it would like to retain the current regulations or loosen them up in some manner.

2. Related to the above issue, there have been concerns raised over the cost of an application for an interim use permit (\$400) - both at the time of the original application and for any renewal.

Interim use permits are required for a variety of uses - anything from full-scale businesses on residential property, to smaller-scale home businesses to the keeping of chickens and other small animals, to pasturing of animals on larger lots.

The question for the Commission would be whether there is a desire to make the application process for interim uses that are of a smaller scale more affordable and less burdensome.

3. A general review of the Township’s (relatively) recent “home occupation” and “interim use” ordinances may be in order. Staff has had a number of instances arise that might suggest possible updates to these ordinances. For instance, a question has been raised as to whether certain uses within commercial/industrial zoned areas should be considered interim uses (most are either permitted or conditional use permits right now). Also, should the limited sale (i.e. 1-2 at a time on an intermittent or regular basis) of used autos on private property be allowed in some manner (it is currently prohibited in the RCR, RR and UR districts and arguably does not qualify as a home occupation due to requirements for screening of outside storage).
4. There is a question as to whether detached accessory buildings on lots smaller than five acres, but are part of an active farming operation (typically on a much larger, adjacent parcel) should be allowed. Currently, such buildings are limited to a maximum of 1500 sq ft if there are no other detached accessory buildings on the property.

5. Regulation of the installation of solar panels is a growing topic of interest/concern in Minnesota communities. The Township's current ordinance is largely silent on these.
6. The spread of invasive species is a growing concern in the area. While attempts to prevent the spread is largely a state (DNR) effort at this point, it is obviously of importance to the Township in terms of possible impacts on property values. Whether the Township can realistically do anything about it is another matter.
7. Several miscellaneous updates to clarify interpretations of Douglas County on certain ordinances.
8. Any other issues of concern raised by the Commission.

Planning Commission Direction: No action is required at this time. The above are for discussion purposes and to outline a work plan (if any) for making ordinance updates.



STAFF REPORT

Issue: Sign ordinance update

Agenda Item: Old Business - 1

Background: Douglas County is currently working on its second draft of the sign ordinance and has tentatively planned for a public hearing at the end of April 2013. At this point, they have invited and taken input from a variety of stakeholders (sign companies, township officials, area business, realtor and daycare representatives, and others). The second draft is based on this input as well as additional research.

I will be meeting with Douglas County staff on Friday March 22 to discuss the second draft and determine what additional changes will be necessary before going to public hearing.

Once the County has held its public hearing (with input, if desired, from the Township), the Township would be reviewing the adopted county ordinance and determining if there are areas where it would like to be more restrictive.

Planning Commission Direction: No action is required at this time. If Douglas County feels that the draft is in sufficient form, after our meeting on March 22, to have me present it to the Commission I will do so. Otherwise, I will send the Commission a draft when it is available.