

VILLAGE OF SPARTA
Kent County, Michigan
Village Council Special Meeting
Monday, February 26, 2024 at 6:00 PM
75 N. Union St. (Sparta Civic Center)

Present Dave Cumings, Brenda Braybrook, Robert Carlstrom, Bill Taylor, Courtney Mais, Tom Peoples, Robert Whalen

Absent: None.

Also Present: Village Manager Jim Lower, DDA Director Elizabeth Morse

1. Call to Order: the meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm.
2. Pledge of Allegiance: The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
3. Roll Call: Formal roll call was taken. Those in attendance/absent are noted above.
4. Additions or Corrections to Consent and Business Agenda

Council President Whalen asked to add to new business item b; annual review of village manager.

5. Approval of Business Agenda: Motion by Braybrook, support by Cumings to approve; Motion passed unanimously 7-0.

6. Public Comment for Agenda Items: None

7. Public Hearing: None.

8. Old Business: None.

9. New Business

- a. Ordinance Update Discussion: The village solicited input from residents on any changes to the ordinance that should be considered by the Village Council. Based on those responses and reading the ordinance, the Council provided ideas for consideration.
 - 1) Sign Ordinance: curious if they are there are allowances for large enough signs, especially in strip mall style businesses/ should there be some signs that do not need a permit, should we consider adding some sign styles that are currently not allowed;
 - 2) Grass ordinance – no real language that allows for native plants (all centralized around how long your grass is), should we support people having native plants in diverse yard structures; Noxious weeds definition is bad, improve the definition and include invasive species. Should we restrict invasive species
 - 3) Auxiliary Structures (living in auxiliary structure) both currently banned, should evaluate the ability to allow this
 - 4) Fences – pretty restrictive rules, height, where they can go, specific materials they can be made out of;
 - 5) Windmills / Solar Panels – not friendly language for allowing wind mills / solar;

- 6) Tree in right of way language: owner must maintain, but the owner must receive written permission from village manager; allowed to plant a tree in the right of way without permission?

Village Manager Jim Lower ordinance notes for discussion:

- 1) Accessory dwelling units (in master plan) ; controlled by village manager office not planning commission; concerns on “how it looks”, control by lot size so don’t end up having too dense vs new apartment construction compared to addition in a current garage or current structure, etc. Concern of high rental in the village already, and interest in creating more homeownership in Village; concern of Exterior structure materials, standards of building (aka pallet cabin), minimum size, set backs, etc. care about size, lot size, material. Will be pursued and detail provided at a future meeting
- 2) Consolidating the business district: leave core business district alone; have commercial and industrial into a business district; no difference between commercial and industrial; would help streamline the process and allow flexibility; aka could have restaurant between factories; could have industrial on State Street vs back in industrial complex/zone; concern over aesthetics of the community; concern of what is on the street frontage (commercial vs large factory); Mixed response on importance of this item by council, was included in master plan manager to pursue further
- 3) Change zoning to public property for School, Village, Township properties from residential. It would stop allowing us to be exempt from ordinances, but would be a separate zoning that could eliminate the criticism in the future; Consensus to proceed
- 4) Consolidating our residential district R1, 2, 3, 4; fixing some inconsistencies in our current ordinance, making medium density and high-density districts; consensus to proceed
- 5) Accessory Building Size: increase what’s allowable in most residential districts; consider adding a cap in comparable of house to accessory structure (balance the site and aesthetics), also is a swing set is considered a structure that would limit future accessory building permits; consensus to pursue
- 6) Sewer issue: if homeowner lateral fails, they have to pay for all of that to hooking it into the main except village will pay for the road component; in other communities it is they pay for all of it, or the village pays 100% from ROW to the sewer main; currently viewed as a benefit for the home owner in the village that the road repair is paid by the Village; Consensus to keep the current policy of the village paying for the road component and make sure the water use ordinance is consistent with this as well
- 7) Signs: allowing more than one sign, evaluating if the ordinance are too restrictive; consensus to evaluate the sign ordinance
- 8) Yard Parking: more flexibility allow folks to park adjacent to their driveway permanently; parking over the sidewalk is a major issue; have to be licensed vehicle driven regularly, with the lawn still maintained; must park parallel to the driveway; is there a way to evaluate requiring an improved driveway overflow (no two track) within a certain period of time? Consensus to pursue change

- 9) Setbacks: inconsistency in where the accessory buildings can be in various districts; unify this requirement among residential districts. Accessory dwelling unit set back vs garden shed set back fixed should be fixed. Consensus to pursue
- 10) Recreational Vehicle Parking: allow resident to park in driveways year-round. Council was split on this issue and it will be discussed again at a future meeting.
- 11) Sidewalk snow removal: The village has a policy that residents are required to clear their own sidewalk. Concept would be that village would remove snow on all sidewalks; Consensus to pursue
- 12) Special land use: state law dictates certain items must be SLU. Idea is to pair back village ordinance to only what is required by the state, not the over and above by local ordinance; consensus to pursue
- 13) Front yard projections: raised flower bed is not allowed in the front yard and would be treated as an accessory building; consensus to allow

B. Village Manager Jim Lower Review – One year review by Village Council in open format.

Comments from Village Council Members:

Cummings: Appreciate creativity getting job done, appreciate energy and open door policy, very transparent

Braybrook: seen get more done than any other manager that we've had, and that is very impressive, gone in different directions and very diverse in that; done absolutely outstanding job, would like to do what need to do to keep you on board

Carlstrom: very impressed with job, likes follow through and collaborative nature

Taylor: doing a good job, like the way that getting loose ends tied up but also get future in mind, like fact that when need something that you are very prompt

Mais: extremely hardworking and communicative, open-door policy is appreciated, and listen to everyone and get things in motion is awesome

Peoples: hit with the feet running on the ground, very impressive job, very excellent communication, love open door policy.

Whalen: done an amazing job, willingness to take on any project, communication with village staff and council is amazing, ability to get the job done sets him apart, your ability to accomplish the task at hand is amazing; staff respects you and likes you, and believes council all agree on that. Recommends to add one year severance to Jim's contract, proposal in increase in wage to \$137K / year; justification is the savings Jim brings to the Village, the "finders fee" from a company to find a replacement manager would be at least \$30,000, and then the limbo/training period to follow;

Motion to approve one year severance to the contract with James Lower – motion by Cummings, support by Braybrook for approval. Motion passed unanimously 7-0

Motion to increase annual salary to \$137,000 by Mais, seconded by Braybrook;

Discussion: Carlstrom asked if it was enough to keep Jim happy; 137K is bottom that the council should consider after looking at the manager market; People would like to go up also due to savings and to

retain Jim; consideration of next evaluation sooner than 12 month mark; Motion approved unanimously 7-0.

10. Village Manager & Department Reports.

Village manager provided a verbal update about the Sowing Seeds Childcare North Complex and Old Orchard.

11. Communications

12. Public Comment

13. Council Member Announcements

14. Adjournment at 8:14 pm