

Township grapples with cluster zoning rules

BY CURTIS ZIMMERMANN

Bedford Now

For the last few months, the Bedford Township Planning Commission has been involved in a difficult endeavor — to construct a new cluster-zoning ordinance.

The purpose of the new cluster zoning ordinance is “to provide an alternative means of development to the landowner on land which is residentially zoned that would create the same number of home sites, but cluster the homes on no more than 50 percent of the land, while leaving the unused land perpetually in an undeveloped state.”

Once in place, the ordinance will give the planning commission the power to allow developers to depart from current subdivision standards to pack houses closer together in both single family housing and condominium developments.

Bedford Township has a cluster-zoning ordinance on the books, but the state of Michigan passed an open space law in 2001 saying that if nobody ever used the ordinance then townships have to write a new one

“*I wish we could have started fresh and made our own ordinance on this issue.*”

— Tom Graham,
township attorney

that coincides with current state statutes.

So, since September, the planning commission has been charged with the task of trying to write the new ordinance.

Ironically, three weeks ago, PTL Inc. submitted a site plan for a development using the old cluster-zoning ordinance, but it was well past the state deadline, so the township has to continue working on the new ordinance.

The township is now two months past the Dec. 15 state deadline and the discussion at the most recent planning commission meeting seemed to bring up just as many questions as answers.

Township officials expressed a certain degree of frustration for having to follow the state’s mandate.

“I wish there wasn’t a state law,” township attorney Tom Graham said.

“I wish we could have started fresh and made our own ordinance on this issue.”

With the new ordinance, the township faces many difficult prospects.

One is to put together a workable ordinance that coincides with the township policy and that also meets the requirements set forth by the Monroe County Road Commission, the Monroe County Drain Commission, the Monroe County Health Department and the Bedford Volunteer Fire Department.

In addition, the township wants to create something that will be beneficial and cost effective for developers to actually use.

According to Wade-Trim consultant Julie Johnston, who is assisting with writing the ordinance, two other townships in Monroe County — Ash Township and Exeter Township — have already passed these ordinances, but no

developer has used them.

After nearly three hours of discussion the commission concluded that a few things in the proposed ordinance needed to be changed.

The most hotly contested item of the evening was whether or not to allow developers to build private roads while applying this ordinance, allowing them to save on building costs.

After an informal vote of 6-1 the commission agreed it would allow private roads but with many controls in place.

In addition, commission members also voted to relax sidewalk and curb provisions in developments using the ordinance, allowing developers to save additional funds.

The commission will address the ordinance again sometime in the coming months before finalizing it and sending it to the township board for final approval.