

RAVENNA TOWNSHIP ZONING COMMISSION

VICKI JOYNER, CHAIRMAN

RUTH SCHELL, JIM JUST, BILL STONE, AND BOB VAIR

The Ravenna Township Board of Zoning Commission met on Wednesday, August 17, 2011 at 7:00 p.m., at the Ravenna Township Trustees Meeting Room at 6115 S. Spring Street, Ravenna, Ohio.

Ruth Schell brought the meeting to order at 7:05p.m.

Roll Call was taken in attendance was Jim Just, Bill Stone, Ruth Schell, Bob Vair, Carolyn Chambers, Zoning Secretary, Jim DiPaola , Zoning Inspector, and Vince Coia Trustee. Also present was Todd Peetz from Regional Planning.

On the agenda was to review the minutes from the September 15, 2010 meeting and a discussion of a General Industry (GI) district to Residential Low (RL) also property maintenance code and adjoining property owners.

Ruth Schell made a motion to accept the minutes and Jim Just second it.
Minutes approved.

Under old business:

There was no old business to discuss at this time.

Open Public Forum:

Diane Lee, 6368 Roselawn St., Ravenna, Ohio

Ruth: You are here to talk about what?

Diane: Property maintenance, property's that aren't being taken care of, property's that has been abandoned. I lived in Ravenna Township for 37 years and I was a member of this board at one time. There is a house across the street from us that was owned by George Steinwender. He owns two properties directly behind on Woodlawn. When I first moved in the property across from me was rented and the family took very good care of it for 20 years and they wanted to purchase the property and were refused to do that he eventually put in to process evicting them and after they left the property was empty and Mr. Steinwender moved in with lots and lots of stuff. The houses on Woodlawn I don't ever remember them being occupied at all. Those two properties at least seem to be taken care of, the lawn is mowed and that sort of thing. Property across the street from me, Mr. Steinwender passed away and his heirs brother, Carl, sister and nephews the Nelson boys. Well, they had brought in two huge dumpster to empty out the house and it stayed empty. They periodically would come in and take care of it. Well, there hasn't been anything done in years. Now last year there was a huge hole in the roof, the gutters were falling off and raccoons coming in and out the yard totally unkept the driveway just mud. The family contacted a contractor and they put a new roof on that house at a cost of \$10,000.00. However, the water got in, there was water setting in the basement, the wooden floors are all buckled, the cabinets are rotting off the walls. But Jim told me that the Prosecutor was advised and that the Prosecutor had told them that they needed to button up that property by July 1 of last year.

Jim DiPaola: We wrote and got the Prosecutor office involved and forced them to fix it at least enclose it.

Diane: Right there is a new roof on that property and all three of them are beautiful brick homes. I still have people coming down the street asking if they can buy them and who

do they contact. But, my experience is that the family doesn't want to sell it. They want to fix them up. They put a new garage door on it and a new front door, \$10,000 dollar roof and there has been no activity at least for 6 month there. The gas company come out and put a tag on the door basically stating that they had disconnected the gas from the house. The septic system, I've heard, is somewhat shared with the houses behind. Even if they did sell it there would be an awful lot of work that would have to be done. Carl Steinwender had the back yard logged a number of years ago. He had a logging company come in and they logged up the back yard and the logging company ask do you want us to get rid of the tops of the trees. Carl said no, we would use that for fire wood. It has all laid there and it is like a swamp back there. All the tops of the trees are laying and there is water underneath it is grown up so far that I can hardly see it from my front window and I stare at that property day after day, year after year. The tag is still on the door, the Nelson boys haven't bothered to do anything with it. Last fall a couple came to the house and I said there is a lot of work there and you may as well demolish the house if you are interested in it, oh no, we are part of the heirs and we are trying to figure out what to do with it. The Roselawn properties are a nice neighborhood, we all maintain our property and basically everybody that was there in 1975 when I bought the place is still there. We all take care of our property, even Mrs. O'Neil's property she has since passed and it is being renovated for repair, even the owner at the end of the street, they maintain it you would not know the house is vacant. I know there is no maintenance code I don't know what we can do; I'm tired of looking at this. The people behind the house, they purchased their property because it was a nice piece of property but, they have told me if they had known what the situation was they would have never bought it. The rodents and insects are just awful I've gone by the houses on Woodlawn and they haven't even been mowed but it's basically just grass so it's up about this high. But across from me all the trees, the seedlings have taken off and it's just a mess. The people on either side don't see it like I see it.

Ruth: Is there any kind of recourse that can be done?

Jim: Yes, we need a property maintenance code and we have had enough complaints and the way the economy is that we need to enact a property maintenance code so that is why we decided to get you folks together and I told Diane this is the meeting to voice her concerns. We have tried to make the Nelsons do something with it but without a property maintenance code we can't force it. The roof's hole and broken windows we can enforce but just the overall look of it we can't do anything.

Bob Vair: I moved in that neighborhood in 1973 the house has been like that since then. A Mercedes has been sitting in that yard for 20 years and never moved.

Diane: It's in the garage. They had a huge tree blow down and that was fixed. Even if they would sell that house across from me there is no way that occupancy would be granted because there has got to be mold and everything all over. You would have to gut it with the mold and everything in there it's just awful.

Bill Stone: With the heat shut off now it's just a place for it to grow.

Jim: Names the Nelson boys, Scot, Todd, Bruce passed away and the one that I have been dealing with is Scot.

Diane: We have heard that George's sister renovates properties then sells them.

Honestly, you should just drive by there and see the house.

Bill: The city of Ravenna has a building maintenance code don't they?

Jim: For the longest time we were told by the Prosecutors office that there is nothing in the Ohio Revised Code that gives the Township the authority to make a property maintenance code. But, we found some language that the Township has limited ability so I went through and looked and found some things that we can kind of mirror and talk about that would give us the ability to have a property maintenance code. That is why I

have ask Todd Peetz from Regional Planning to be here because we've talked about property maintenance stuff in Regional Planning too.

Todd: We had a quarterly Zoning Inspectors meeting back in May and basically it was about property maintenance and we looked at the Boardman and Green Township codes and we found probably three more. We have another quarterly Zoning Inspectors meeting and also inviting all the zoning commissions as well as the Board of Zoning Appeals. Basically the chair person or a representative to be there. We did find a number of codes for Townships that involves property maintenance. Chris Meduri asks me for copies of those and found them very enlightening. Most part he thinks we could do property maintenance and I'll see him again tomorrow at another meeting. Which tomorrow's topic is Agricultural use. I can make copies for you of other property maintenance codes that came from a Township's code. (Names everything it covers) The issues are the foreclosures, as we know, and maybe more than this Nelson house. You have abandonment, and neglect also the renters that are out there that need to be educated because they are not taking care of the property the way they should be so they may not understand the rules the way they should be. Like the couch on the front porch and stuff like that are not good things to do. Parts of the problem are the yards that people start to look at the yards think they are not keeping up with it why am I keeping up with it? The appearance degrades the neighborhood and the properties are beginning to be sold at low market value it's a downward spiral verses if you clean these things up then other people want to clean things up and take care of it a little more. I will research some codes and put together a property maintenance for you to look at, at another meeting in the near future we can do that. It wouldn't take more than 10 to 15 hours of time to piece something together for you guys to look at. I don't think we have used any of your hours.

Jim: In the last two years I don't think we have used any or very little.

Vince: Todd do you feel you can come up with something between Regional Planning, the Board, and the Township that this is something that once it's in place then we can go in and go after these property owners that have the uncut grass and trash in the yard and so on.

Todd: I would definitely share my information with the Prosecutor's office to make sure he gets it and feels comfortable with it and the other thing the Zoning Inspector needs to know clearly what it says and then has to be clear for the public to know what it says. It can't be all mumbo jumbo and understandable for everyone and user friendly. Before you adopt something you have to make sure the Prosecutor gives it the thumbs up and support it.

Vince: I would hate to see us burn up some hours and waste every body's time. I firmly believe we have had this conversation before with me and Jim since I've started and that is something the Township needs. Between the houses and the area that you come into from the different angles of the Township, 59 and Blackhorse or coming in the other ways there are some unsightly properties. We don't have the money to tear down all these houses, we can force these people to tear them down or get them fixed and that would be great cause there is definitely quite a few of them. For \$10,000.00 they could have tore that house down.

Diane: I am grateful for the properties that have been taken down most recently the second one on Wall St. and I know it is expensive and I know money is tight but, this Ravenna Township has been my home for a very long time and I don't want people to get the idea that it is ok to come into Ravenna Township cause we can do just about anything that we want because they can't do anything. We have a situation around the corner and I'm sure it's in other places as well, two elderly folks have passed away and the family took one house and the other house the family opened it up to the neighborhood if any of us wanted to buy the property and it sits just a little bit on Rose St well, the folks that

have moved in there have bond fires they burn couches or they burn pallets and it is usually late at night and I look up and catty-corner from me I can look over at the neighbors house and the flames are higher than his roof. Sometimes the ashes are so bad it looks like it snowed on our properties. They use the vacant lot to park their cars, they have gas grills and stuff in the front yard they have a side yard and a back yard. If they wanted room to have bond fires there are plenty of other properties they could have gone to. This is a residential neighborhood and I have nothing against family gathering or friends gathering and a little bond fire but when you have this huge thing and it is raining ash on everything the neighborhood we have called the fire department and the sheriff's department and they have both responded. I don't like the idea that they think it is ok to move into a neighborhood and do that kind of thing. We all take pride in our neighborhood and it is a nice neighborhood. I'm just afraid of the type of element that's coming in and people think they can behave in this manner.

Ruth: I'm surprised it is happening in that area. I have always thought it is a nice area.

Jim: It only takes one and once you let one come into that area and that's the problem with rental properties too, is that if you don't make the landlord accountable then you have a problem and that's what the city ran into they didn't make the landlord accountable. So we don't want that in the Township cause for years the Zoning Inspectors before me have just let things go the way they wanted to and it's gotten to the point where we have to do something. In the last three years we have had at least 18 structures demolished and that's some of them we had to take out of a fund we had money for. The fourteen trailers that were demolished out on Dawley and 14 the property owner paid for those but pretty much everything else.

Ruth: I always thought the property owner was responsible for that.

Jim: They have to be made accountable one way or another and the thing with the trailer park was trailers parks are not something that's allowed so once their use discontinues for 2 years or more then we can enforce Zoning Code and that's what we did out there. We told them these trailers have been abandoned for at least two years and that's the way we can do it but without a property maintenance code for any kind of rental code we are kind of stuck.

Bob: On the houses themselves you can't do what we used to do and burn them?

Jim: We could if there is something available to burn but now it has to go through all the test for asbestos and all the other stuff and the cost of burning everything went from down here to up here so it's just as cheap to demolish it.

Diane: I'm grateful that Jim is in contact with the Prosecutor's office and they are trying to do something but if you don't have a maintenance code in place and you only have one person in place that is overseeing the whole county and trying to take care of things like this it's not a good situation. I take pride in my property and so do my neighbors and then there's this thing sitting there. I would appreciate it if you would really take this under consideration and see what can be done not only for this property but for those all over the Township.

Ruth: It would be a good thing for us to look into and do.

Jim: Especially now that we found out that it is doable. We found out by reading Ohio Revised Code that it's your certain size population you have limited home rule and Ravenna Township falls under that limited home rule so we can put something together and hopefully by doing all this and having the meetings quarterly Zoning Inspectors we can put enough pressure also on the Prosecutor office to assign a second person to the Township. Chris Meduri is good but he covers every Township in Portage County. Right now Ravenna Township is the squeaky wheel so we kind of get our stuff shoved to the forefront but, that is going to last for only so long until someone else gets the squeaky wheel.

Discussion of the bond fires that the neighbor has followed with Jim going to call the Akron Air Quality to get something that the fire department faxes this stuff or someone get in touch with them.

Ruth: Do we have anything else to discuss?

Jim: The only other thing that I had on the list was, up at the top part of our Township Zoning map is a General Industrial (GI) what from I gathered when that was rezoned General Industrial it was done for two reasons something about sand and gravel but also adult entertainment because general industrial is the only place where adult entertainment is allowed and that is Pfeiffer's property that got rezoned and Mr. Pfeiffer owned the bar that sits on the corner and he at one time wanted to put adult entertainment up in this area. So somehow or another he got the thing rezoned and there is no buffer zone we have tried to redo it so that there are buffer zones between like a general industrial and that where you have general commercial but it is all residential low density (RL) so I thought we want to take a good hard look at that and get it zoned back to residential low density (RL) and keep the general industrial out of there. There is no reason for it to be there. The other general industrial is out at Cotton Corners and along 14 out towards Birchwood.

Bill: You never done anything with that right? The bar is closed now and it actually has been vacated for years.

Jim: No, the bars closed and we are getting ready to get rid of the bar next.

Bob: Who owns that? Algers?

Jim: I'm not sure who all owns that I think part of that is Bears property. There is about four properties in there.

Bob: Is Giullitto in that little section that is not zoned general?

Jim: He might be in the area that is not zoned for that. There is some farming that has gone on in that area.

Ruth: That bar is not being used is it?

Jim: No

Bill: Is that agricultural now?

Jim: I think some of Pfeiffer's property is there and he's got some junk and trash on it and I think it is pretty much agricultural right now.

Bill: He's paying what kind of taxes on it?

Jim: I don't know, he's probable not paying what he should. We have gone through all the address files and pull out all the agricultural exemptions that have been given out all the years and during the winter I'm going to go through and make sure all those are legit because there was a lot of them that were given out that weren't. We figure we have another 2 to 3 years of cleaning up the Zoning Code and getting some codes put into place that we can enforce and clean the township up. Our goal in the office is try to get the four major ways into Ravenna cleaned up which means next year you will see the old Blackhorse Tavern go down. We are working with the Trustees right now trying to get a line item set up right now for our office so that every year we have some money put into a fund where we can do some demolition on worst ones and there are grants out there that we can go after to get some money to knock down the rest of them.

Vince: If we ever get some suitable bids on some property that we want to sell, I will try to get that money put into that line item, I can't get all but at least half of it and then use that money for such projects plus to get grant money and add to that there is quite a bit of stuff to clean up. People call me with what they call hot spots and want them cleaned up.

Todd: Did you want to prepare a Zoning request and bring it back to this board to recommend to take back to Regional Planning Commission.

Jim: If that is something they want to look at, if you want to have a couple more meetings and look into it or what you want to do it's up to you folks.

Bill: You were planning on drawing something up anyhow weren't you. For the Property maintenance

Todd: This would be taking a lot property and a bunch of aerials and maps and do the report and if you say move forward with this we would want to meet with the property owner at some point so that they know what's going on and are not totally blindsided by it.

Jim: We have a whole section in there that deals with rezoning and that where we have to send out notices, there has to be hearing and all kind of things to move forward.

Bob: Is there another Township that had one of these also?

Jim: Yes, we will mail this stuff out to you guys. This one here is Green Township and it is 23 pages. You can look it over and there is Boardman also.

Bill: These townships would fall under our category with the population size wise?

Jim: Yes, with the limited home rule that we have this would fit perfectly, this is Plain Township and Green Township and they fit our category. By the next meeting if you want Todd to bring something back for property maintenance stuff we can do that too. We need to do this it is time to clean the Township up.

Carolyn: One thing that I wanted to bring up was the changing of the adjoining property owners from 500 ft. I sent out 65 adjoining property owners notice to people that didn't even have a clue that this company was even there. I think it should go back to what it was before instead of 500 ft. go back to adjoining property owners.

Jim: It used to be adjoining property owners when we did the Zoning book change it went to 500 ft. which we just had a issue in conditional use on Hazel. We had to send notices on everybody in the Bryn Mawr Condominiums in the 500 ft there were 65 mailings that we had to do and we had maybe 6 people show up. One guy said I'm not even next door, I don't even know why I'm here. So we would like to see that part of it go back the way it was.

Carolyn: Actually the ones that did show up were the adjoining property owners they live in the city and this roadside towing is in the township but their properties butt against each other.

Bill: Adjoining properties does that include the property across the street?

Jim: Yes, immediately across the street.

Carolyn: This guys on Hazel and I'm sending notices to people that live behind the Sheriff's department and they are not adjoining property owners.

Bill Stone made a motion that Todd Peetz draws up something on all three items and brings them back to the next meeting. Jim Just second it. R/C: Ruth Schell-yes, Jim Just-yes, Bill Stone-yes, and Bob Vair-yes, motion passed. This is not to exceed 20 hours of time.

The next meeting will be on Wednesday, September 21, 2011.

Bill Stone made a motion to adjourn and Bob Vair second it, meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m. R/C Jim Just- yes, Bill Stone-yes, Ruth Schell- yes, and Bob Vair-yes.

Respectfully submitted by:

Carolyn Chambers
Zoning Secretary

cc: Trustees (Coia, Artz, Gibson)
Zoning Inspector (DiPaola)
Zoning Commission (5)
File