

**PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE
CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF GRAND RAPIDS
Minutes June 25, 2013**

A regular scheduled meeting of the Planning Commission of Grand Rapids Charter Township was held at the Township Hall on Tuesday, June 25, 2013 at 7:00pm.

Present were Chair Wayne Harrall, Vice Chair Stephen Fry, Secretary David A. VanDyke, Commissioners; Bev Wall, Dave Pierangeli and Scott Connors. Also present were Township Attorney Jim Brown and Planning Assistant Kara Hammond. Commissioner Mark Prein was absent.

1. Approve minutes of May 30, 2013 special meeting.

Steve Fry, seconded by **Dave Pierangeli**, moved to approve the minutes without any changes. **Motion approved unanimously.**

2. Public Hearing – YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids – Special Land Use application for a two-story recreation facility at 433 Leonard St NE.

Ron Nelson, President and CEO of the YMCA of greater Grand Rapids, presented the proposed request:

- Gave a brief background of the YMCA, leading non-profit, mission is to build mind body and spirit – regardless of ability to pay
- Just adopted a new vision, called inclusion
- 20% of operating budget deals with “inclusion”
- 144 years of serving community
- Current location can no longer accommodate to their members/community
- SE YMCA is largest on usage of fields
- Looked at 43 other locations, but none suitable for their needs
- Private donations of up to 8 million dollars have been donated

Cheryl Scales, consulting engineer from progressive ae:

- Proposed site location is at corner of Crahen and Leonard
- 29.2 acres of developable land
- Currently being used as the Grand Rapids golf course
- Site access allows for two access points
 - o Leonard entrance will remain where the golf course entrance currently is
 - o Crahen entrance will be the primary entrance/drive
- 99,000 sq feet is the footprint of the proposed building
- Highest point is 28ft tall
- Combination of brick, steel panel
- Site is designed to be a total design, ADA accessible
- Goal is to be LEED silver certified
- Looped drive along outside to keep vehicle traffic away from pedestrian traffic
- Completely shielded from the homes
- None of the fields will be lit at night, fields will only be used during the day
- Regulated wetland is shown, other two ponds are not regulated wetlands

- Part of their mission to educate people where food comes from (referring to the proposed 'farm' area)
- Parking lots are separated into various use areas
 - o Providing 697 parking spaces
 - o 75 green spaces
- ADA path, around perimeter
- All lighting will meet Township requirements
- Landscaping- buffer zone all around site
 - o Views are shown as the trees will be planted
- Utility and infrastructure – will work with Township Engineer on all items, including storm water
- Public water would have to be extended, 16” water main
- Sanitary sewer would be ran as well
 - o Both water and sewer meet the Township Master Plan and the YMCA is aware the cost will be their responsibility

Ron Nelson stated he is aware there is a great deal of sensitivity with the public and residents regarding the proposed special land use request. Ron explained the YMCA does not hurt communities, it helps communities.

Ron stated the special land use request does not have to meet all 7 general standards, but it actually does;

1. One story walkout, footprint less than 95,000 sq ft, not the largest in the Township, location is setback away from surrounding neighborhoods, more than twice as far away from road than FHN, 58% of the property will remain green, connects to Township trails
2. Traffic generated by the proposed YMCA project can be easily accommodated by the adjacent street system, left turn lane on Crahen, deceleration lane on Leonard, they will adhere to any recommendations the Kent County Road Commission has, adequate off-street parking will be provided (no on street parking), 75 spaces will be green and available for overflow parking, pedestrian and vehicle traffic will be harmonious
3. Not a factory so will not be producing most of those items, LEED certified, lighting will be deflected away from adjacent properties and roads
4. Setback – 540' from Leonard, 420' from Crahen, height; 19 feet at south elevation, 32 feet at north elevation, landscaping exceeds Townships minimum requirement, will not have a negative impact on home value
5. Preservation of open space in that 58% of this project will remain green, existing ponds and wetlands set aside, provision of interior walking trail connections, pedestrian access to Crahen Valley Park, avoidance of only one street carrying traffic, encourages neighborhood focal point, retention of existing vegetation and will be adding to it
6. Utilities will expand the capacity of public services in accordance with Township standards, estimated cost of 1.8 million dollars will be paid by the YMCA, already have one site in Grand Rapids Township, just moving sites/new location
7. All focused on improving the overall wellness of the community

Ron reiterated his strong belief that the YMCA meets all the requirements for a Special Land Use.

Mary Ellen Rodgers, Chair of YMCA Board of Directors, Winterwood resident, spoke on behalf of the YMCA:

- Has lived in Winterwood for 13 years

- Feels very strongly in making our Township stronger
- Been involved with the YMCA for 10 years and has been very impressed with them
- Innovates cutting edge
- Two years of planning effort has gone in for a new location
- This is a YMCA like no other and will be proud to have it in our community
- YMCA is not out to hurt kids and she is offended by the people who think it is
- This is about the greater good of the Township and community
- Petition of over 1,000 signatures in favor and read some posts from Facebook page 'Say Yes to the New Southeast Y'
- Very hopeful this will be a great asset to the place she calls home

Attorney Jim Brown gave the legal report.

Dave Pierangeli asked about section 6.3 in the ordinance, regarding non-profit, explained he is trying to understand why it is worded the way it is. Jim Brown said interpret it as you may, that would be part of the Planning Commission's decision.

Dave Pierangeli, seconded by **Bev Wall**, moved to open the Public Hearing at 7:49pm. **Motion approved unanimously.**

David Sadler, 751 Bradford Farms Ln NE – oppose

- does not conform to zoning ordinance or master plan
- devaluation of residential property values
- largest YMCA facility ever proposed in the USA (actually in the Western Hemisphere)
- GRT has never approved a commercial structure east of Eaglecrest Drive which is zoned SR

Fred Ensley, 1379 Suncrest Dr NE – oppose

- supports the YMCA but not the location
- wondered if the salvation army would be considered non-profit and be allowed to put a store at the proposed location
- all have to leave Eaglecrest onto Leonard, over 1,000 cars at that intersection
- concerned with traffic and safety of students
- many other places to build (on the East Beltline)

James P. White, 1074 Whitewood Farms Ct NE – oppose

- encouraged PC not to jeopardize the integrity of the Township and thanked the PC for their service to the community
- YMCA is a commercial enterprise under the veil of a non-profit
- does not fit with zoning ordinance or master plan
- traffic concerns
- child safety concerns at the 6 area schools

Maddy Wilson, 1772 Park Trail NE – support

- swims with RAYS (Rapids Area Y Swimmers)
- been part of the youth programs at the YMCA for 10 years
- it's more than a health club it is about community

Lisa Town, 791 Greenbrier Dr SE – support

- lives on Greenbrier within walking distance of the current SE YMCA location
- YMCA is an asset to the community

Trish Whitaker, 3099 Hoag Ave NE – support

- GRT resident since 1982
- talked about daughter
- active YMCA members
- SE YMCA in desperate need of renovation
- new YMCA will be a huge asset to our community
- enhance a sense of pride as a resident of GRT

Barb Hufford, 1325 Suncrest Dr NE – support

- lived here since 1959
- drives Leonard & Crahen every day and has never noticed a traffic problem

Larry McDonough, 4535 Leonard St NE – oppose

- moved here in 1965
- does not fit master plan or zoning ordinance
- 4,000 members at the proposed new YMCA with vendors and employees-no room
- many young drivers in that area – lots of accidents
- very serious decision to the entire area and need to protect the old and young
- significant safety concerns

Michael Breon, 1061 Whitewood Farms Ct NE – oppose

- house is directly across from the golf course
- not going to discuss emotional issues, just stick to the facts
- not part of the master plan
- greater traffic volume on entirety of all streets

Neil Topliffe, 1918 Dunlin Ct NE – support

- new facility will be a positive asset to our area and Township
- can attest that it is a non-profit organization
- first class facility to entire family, young to old
- does not feel safety, regarding traffic, is a concern

Richard Young, 5633 Sanctuary Dr NE – support

- passionate about this project
- huge asset to entire community, and surrounding communities

Robert Upton, 1407 Laurel Ave SE – support

- if proposed building/site is denied, it will deprive the people of this community of what a community could be, and should be
- quoted Robert Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
- do the right thing and approve the new SE YMCA
- YMCA has a strong track record, why not approve the new SE YMCA

Jeff Chick, 460 Carnoustie Ave SE – support

- GRT resident for 17 yrs with, 4 kids
- 25 year YMCA member
- purchased home because it is close to the (current) YMCA
- 4 neighborhoods have been built since they moved there
- Forest Hill Ave was widened due to more residents
- new YMCA or a new housing subdivision?
- approve the request for the good of our community and children

Jim Bradbury, 4469 Whitewood Farms Dr NE – oppose

- complemented the Township and its zoning ordinance
- no ill will against the YMCA but the footprint is too large for the location
- youngest son has special needs, supports what the YMCA is trying to do, but does not support the YMCA proposed location and size of building
- questioned the YMCA's "exit strategy" and not paying taxes

Hank Fuhs, 3848 Leonard St NE – oppose

- residential area, it is all about the proposed location
- stick to the facts

Ginger Feldman, 4353 Kennilworth Dr SE – support

- whole social life revolves around the YMCA
- her neighborhood and residents are excited
- creating jobs in this area
- would be sad to see the YMCA leave our area

Jerry Callahan, 1715 Flowers Crossing Dr NE – support

- 13 year resident
- fits our community very well
- huge asset

Kathy Larson, 2827 Cascade Rd SE – support

- active in the health field and senior health
- important to have this facility so readily available to older people and seniors

Robert Rehkopf, 3802 Knapp St NE – support

- 25 year resident
- cognitively impaired daughter who has been taken in by the YMCA (members and employees)
- loving, caring people at the YMCA
- trust everyone there by allowing daughter to go there
- valuable asset to our community

Kevin Roosien, 1381 Winterwood Dr NE – oppose

- loves the YMCA, but not the location – it is not right
- not a suitable location
- YMCA have all been located in commercial zoned areas

David Beach, 1020 Crahen Ave NE – oppose

- lives directly across from the proposed site
- not opposed to the YMCA, opposed to the location
- traffic and safety concerns

Elizabeth Stone, Towers St – support

- swims on the RAYS swim team
- 3 time Paralympic athlete
- YMCA is accommodating to everyone

Andrew Smith, 3794 Leonard St NE – oppose

- lives directly across from FHN
- traffic concerns
- “commercial enterprise”, sounds more like an athletic facility with an athletic field

Jim Wierenga, 50 Monroe Ave NW – attorney retained by the “citizens of GRT”

- do not have grounds to approve under 6.3

Laurie Cavanaugh, 4689 Braeburn Dr SE – support

- lives by current SE YMCA
- saved her sons life-dedication to inclusion saved him
- need an organization with a positive impact on this community
- does not see traffic issues/concerns

Erin Molhoek, 2546 Blackberry Ln NE – support

- understands the traffic concerns, but brought up the traffic study that was done

Steve DeNolf, 811 Crahen Ave NE – support

- community item
- change is inevitable, things will always move forward
- the proposed site location could eventually be more homes, would rather see the YMCA there
- move forward the best way possible for the entire Township

Mark Farah, 4644 Oakwright Dr NE – submitted a letter opposing the request, but spoke about trying to help the YMCA

- agrees the current SE YMCA is outdated
- suggested putting the fields on the golf course and re-doing the building on the existing location
- wants to see the YMCA stay in the Township and have a new building and fields, but feels it has to be done right

Rick Joel, 1331 Winterwood Dr NE – oppose

- stated the GRT zoning ordinance has been done (compiled) right (correctly)
- YMCA is trying to “pull a fast one”
- once the YMCA is there, no one will build homes there
- there is no going back, say no

Murphy Keeley, 833 Crahen Ave NE – oppose

- lived on Crahen Ave for 2 years
- believes this is nothing but a money issue
- look at other options/locations in the area
- proposed site is a suburban area
- no public transportation

Jim Postma, 4065 Winterwood Trl NE – oppose

- great idea, bad location
- belongs on Fulton or the East Beltline

Tom Blackwell, 4630 Bradford St NE – oppose

- wrote letter to PC in April
- does not comply with zoning ordinance
- not against the YMCA, just the wrong place for a project this size

Michael Bemben, 4460 Heather Lane SE – oppose

- 5-6 years ago there were plans to remodel the current YMCA, now they are proposing a whole new site, what is going to become of the golf course and the green space/area
- traffic issues and concerns
- definition, and intent, of “non-profit” is important here

Jeff Wilberding, 248 Oakshire Ct NE – support

- make the decision based on the facts
- look at the history of the YMCA, their legacy
- enriches the community
- best interest of this Township

Larry Knapp, 1383 Suncrest Dr NE – oppose (to location)

- retired to GRT (Eaglecrest)
- watched the “commercial crawl” occur down the East Beltline
- traffic issues/concerns
- biggest attraction to GRT, was and is the semi-rural area

Chuck Eardley, 4270 Bradford St NE – support

- save the kids and old folks as well, approve the YMCA

Ben Kieff, 4495 Whitewood Farms Dr NE – oppose

- suggested the PC take the emotion out of the equation
- it does not fit/work at that location

Laura Hill, 3611 Arbor Chase Ct NE – support

- agrees with all previous supportive comments

Jeff Hill, 3611 Arbor Chase Ct NE – support

- YMCA has much better programs for kids than other (health club) places
- proposed location is great
- growth and development help the economy

David Byker, 4060 Leonard St NE – support

- concurs with Mary Ellen Rodgers, and her statements
- accept traffic issues and live with it
- put up with the traffic because of the school district/schools

Jerry Abraham, 1357 Winterwood Dr NE – oppose

- supports the YMCA, not the location
- what is the rest of the land (golf course) going to look like in the future
- agrees with fields at one location and the facility in another

George Orphan, 701 Crahen Ave NE – oppose

Carol Fuhs, 3914 Leonard St NE – oppose

- not against the YMCA, opposed to the location
- traffic is a huge issue
- master plan states it is residential
- family values start in the home, not the YMCA

Joe Rogers, 4170 Leonard St NE – not happy with the Township and the planning decisions that have been made

Francine Robinson, 1148 Forest Hill Ave SE – support

- YMCA has made a difference in her life and her family's life
- YMCA is very inclusive, and so is Forest Hills (school district)
- overall a good fit
- enhance our community

Eric Lundstrom, 10300 Downes St NE – support

- YMCA is a great thing and enhances the community
- bought his home in GRT in 1985/86 because of the proximity of the SE YMCA
- YMCA enhances and boosts property values

Daryl Larsen, 1480 Winterwood Dr NE – support

- approves the site location change and agrees with the two entrances at the current proposed site
- YMCA is a superior neighbor
- the community is under-serviced when it comes to a pool and pool facilities
- new pool will be a compliment to the area and community
- agrees traffic is too fast and is an issue, suggested reducing the speed limit to 35 mph on both Leonard and Crahen

Steve Fry, seconded by **Dave Pierangeli**, moved to close the Public Hearing at 9:29pm. **Motion approved unanimously.**

5 minute break

Wayne Harrall explained this is not about whether the YMCA is a great facility or not, it is about if it fits in the location under the zoning ordinance and master plan of the Township.

Bev Wall stated she had been wrestling with the idea for several weeks and whether it will fit or not. In her estimation, five criteria/standards pass, two do not. The two that do not pass are huge; big facility and grounds, does not fit/not harmonious and it does not fit within the master plan.

Dave Pierangeli struggled with the non-profit entity, and if the YMCA is or not. Dave explained he views the YMCA as a commercial use and does not think it passes. He believes the first hurdle is getting past 6.3 and he cannot even get past that.

Dave VanDyke stated he had four standards that do not pass, two that surpass and one that could go either way. Dave agreed with Bev that the two standards the YMCA does not meet are the two heaviest weighed. The master plan always has been and even in future will be residential. Dave feels the YMCA is more than a health club, it is a commercial enterprise, even though it is owned and operated as non-profit, he still feels it is a commercial enterprise.

Wayne Harrall acknowledged the large buildings the YMCA used as examples on their reports, but noted they were all schools. Wayne also acknowledged that Meijer Gardens has frontage on the East Beltline and noted, however, it is not seen from the road. Wayne said a building with the magnitude the YMCA is proposing cannot be hidden, nor would it be harmonious with that area. Wayne explained it does not fit the master plan, or what the master plan intended for that area. Wayne noted the master plan referred to community facilities for that specific residential area and explained the YMCA is not residential. He understands it is non-profit, but believes it is truly a similar use as other health clubs. Wayne explained the Kent County Road Commission had looked at traffic report and the proposed site actually disperses the traffic better than the previous site location on Leonard. Wayne said there is a lot of traffic out there with lots of young drivers, and old drivers too. He is not concerned about the additional traffic because the YMCA said they would be willing to do whatever the Road Commission suggests. Wayne agrees with Bev as well, the two standards that do not work are the biggest.

Steve Fry said he tried to place himself in people's shoes to see where each side was coming from. Steve said the request does meet some criteria/standards, but it does not have to meet them all. Steve explained he struggling with the criteria and standards and stated he would have to abstain at that point. Steve said he was leaning towards tabling the request as he likes the YMCA and would like to partner with them, but he needs more.

Scott Conners said the word 'harmonious' keeps coming up and stated he has noticed commercial buildings are interspersed in residential areas throughout the Township. Scott agreed traffic was a concern and an issue that needs to be worked through, but stated he was leaning towards approving the special land use request at that point.

Dave VanDyke said the commissioners owe it to the YMCA and the residents to come to some kind of decision, in reference to possibly tabling the request. Dave explained there are certain rules already in place and whether the commissioners or audience like it, these are the rules and they are in place for a reason. Dave stated the special land use request simply does not rise to the standards. Bev Wall questioned if there would be any advantage to tabling the request. Steve Fry wondered if there was any way to look past those words for the benefits of the community and is concerned the zoning may be outdated. Wayne Harrall explained they have to look at the

words that are given for a special land use in the zoning ordinance that is why there is a zoning ordinance to follow.

The Commissioners discussed the seven standards in Section 24.11 and arrived at a general consensus as follows:

1. The YMCA building, 118,600 square feet, is far too large to be compatible or harmonious with the single-family homes in the neighborhood and the vicinity. A building this large would have a severe impact on this highly residential area of the Township.
2. The proposed use would increase traffic on Leonard Street and Crahen Avenue, especially during peak traffic times, when school buses will be using the streets. The site plan shows almost 700 parking spaces, so heavy use of the facility is expected. However, if developed under the current SR Zoning, this property will increase traffic on Leonard Street and Crahen Avenue.
3. There would not be problems because of noise, dust, smoke, vibration, etc.
4. If the facility were built, it could change the residential area so much that there may be pressures on the Township to approve more intense development, and very likely commercial uses. This could harm the property values of the many homes in the area and discourage more residential development.
5. This use does not comply with the Township's Comprehensive Plan. The Plan designates the golf course for future residential development. There is no suggestion in the Plan for any use such as this, which has all the earmarks of a commercial health club, even though it is owned and operated by the YMCA. The Plan does mention a community building as a possible use, but this is for the neighborhood itself, rather than the much larger area that the YMCA would be drawing customers from.
6. The public services that would be needed for the YMCA could be accommodated if certain improvements are made. The applicant has agreed to comply with what the County Road Commission may require as to driveways, deceleration lanes, etc. to make the streets safer for the increased amount of traffic. The applicant has also agreed to pay for the needed extensions of the public water and sanitary sewer systems to serve the building and property.
7. Overall, the use does not comply with most of the standards that must be satisfied in order for the Planning Commission to approve it, especially the first and fifth standards, which call for the use to be compatible and harmonious with surrounding land uses and to comply with the Comprehensive Plan designations for the future use of the property and the area.

Dave VanDyke, seconded by **Bev Wall**, moved to deny the Special Land Use request at 4300 Leonard St NE as presented by the applicant with reasoning;

- Does not meet one and five of the special land use standards
- No access to a major road
- Violates all past, present and even future ideas for the Master Plan
- Does not meet the commercial enterprise of 6.3.2 (more of a commercial venture)

A roll call vote was taken;

Bev Wall – Aye

Dave Pierangeli – Aye

Dave VanDyke – Aye

Wayne Harrall – Aye

Steve Fry – Nay

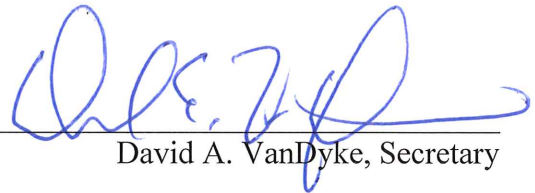
Scott Conners – Nay

Motion passed 4-2.

3. General Public Comment.

There was no general public comment given.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:13pm.



David A. VanDyke, Secretary