

**MINUTES**  
**REGULAR MEETING OF THE OWOSSO PLANNING COMMISSION**  
**Council Chambers, City Hall**  
**March 25, 2013 – 7:00 pm**

**CALL TO ORDER:** Meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairman William Wascher.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by all in attendance.

**ROLL CALL:** Roll Call was taken by Recording Secretary Marty Stinson.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman William Wascher; Secretary Melvin Renfrow ; Commissioners David Bandkau, Tom Kurtz, Cindy Popovitch, Ron Schlaack, Brent Smith, and Thomas Taylor.

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Vice-Chairman Frank Livingston.

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Adam Zettel, Assistant City Manager and Director of Community Development; Tom Manke, Friends and Community News and Views; and Councilmember Burton Fox.

**AGENDA APPROVAL:**

**MOTION BY COMMISSIONER POPOVITCH, SUPPORTED BY COMMISSIONER KURTZ TO APPROVE THE AGENDA FOR MARCH 25, 2013.**

**YEAS ALL. MOTION CARRIED.**

**MINUTES APPROVAL:**

**MOTION BY COMMISSIONER POPOVITCH, SUPPORTED BY COMMISSIONER SCHLAAK TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF JANUARY 28, 2013**

**YEAS ALL. MOTION CARRIED.**

**COMMUNICATIONS:**

1. Staff memorandum
2. PC minutes from January 28, 2013
3. City council minutes from March 4, 2013
4. Design guidelines text
5. Outdoor sales and storage; temporary use text

**COMMISSIONER / PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Mr. Tom Manke, Friends and Community News and Views, 118 S. Washington, thanked the Planning Commissioners for serving on behalf of his readers. He continued about the city being a renters association and that was undesirable according to his readers. The recently proposed ordinance was very poorly received on his website. Comments indicated that no one is telling anyone what color to paint their house; no one is going to tell me I have to have a garage or shed; council will just be voted out; and people have too many rules and regulations.

Damien Benjamin, 615 W. King Street, just purchased a home and was glad to become a homeowner. He was looking forward to siding his home but doesn't want someone dictating to him. He just wants to enjoy his home and investment.

Commissioner Schlaak is a member of Mr. Manke's website and noted that every house isn't meant to be the same; that's not true of the ordinance.

Mr. Zettel commented that he didn't know where this was all coming from. The ordinances are meant for new construction only. There has is not a provision on color or back yard hedges. Fence height is proposed to be regulated in a manner similar to the current regulations and hedges are not considered to be fences. He will work as long as necessary to make these ordinances workable with the public. They are not dictating the colors homes can be painted or sided. He noted the only color restriction was applicable to new commercial buildings which are not to be fluorescent or neon colored.

Mr. Manke asked if any new home had to match in color, pitched roof – no flat roofs. Mr. Zettel said it is the intent – if a historic home burns down, can it be rebuilt with cinder block? How important is character? The intent is to avoid grossly dissimilar homes.

Mr. Manke stated that federal and state law says you can't dictate a modular home can't be installed. You can't stop them. Mr. Zettel said it's in the Master Plan. People choose their communities. Owosso believes our neighborhoods should be nice.

Dan Harrow is a tenant from Mason Street. What right does anyone else have to tell me what to do.? I should be able to have barbed wire fences in my front yard if I want to. Commissioner Schlaak answered that your neighbors will lose tens of thousands of dollars in value for their homes.

Mr. Zettel commented that if a home is burned down, a house has to be built to current code. To what degree is Owosso interested in investing in various standards?

Commissioner Kurtz commented that this information has been discussed for about five months and the information out in the public is now skewed. Maybe we should create a summary document with facts – it would clear up many misconceptions. Mr. Zettel said he could do that.

Chairman Wascher stated this only affects new construction.

Commissioner Popovitch stated we are experiencing plummeting property values and tax revenue to the City. Citizens don't want their taxes increased, yet still expect their roads to be maintained, water and sewer service, snow plowed, leaves picked up, police and fire service, parks maintained, and somehow for the city to create a thriving downtown economy. City tax revenue is driven by taxation against home values. What people don't seem to grasp is that if we don't protect property values by having at least minimum standards, the value of homes will continue to decline resulting in further reduced tax revenue to the City, and further reductions in service. A house is one of the most expensive purchases that a person will make in a lifetime. Protecting the value of homes and neighborhoods and downtown buildings will help maintain the value of those investments, and will support the City revenues that allow for it to provide the services that residents want.

Mr. Zettel asked if he should make this document or have the public hearing in a month first. Commissioner Schlaak said the FAQ first.

Mr. Zettel said we need to disseminate information on Facebook more often. We need to respond more often rather than holding back. Mr. Manke said to send him news items and he would put it on his site as a quote.

City Councilmember Fox stated he knows what it's like to sit at this table; be a property owner. People don't fully understand the ordinances. We need clear communications. Some ordinances were vague. Wording needs to be precise.

Chairman Wascher stated we don't have any representatives from the Independent or The Argus Press anymore. They used to show up for the meetings.

Mr. Zettel said we could do a workshop at the April meeting. He also said the ordinance is on the city's website for public review. He'll put some "bites" on the social media also.

**SITE PLAN REVIEW:** None

**BUSINESS ITEMS:** Design Guidelines Ordinance and Outdoor Sales and Storage; Temporary Uses

Commissioner Bandkau suggested removing the hedge language. The existing is almost the same otherwise.

Commissioner Popovitch said infill housing is about if a house burns down, the house would fill in between two others. We are looking to protect the integrity of the neighborhoods.

Mr. Zettel felt the Temporary Uses was cleaned up pretty well.

Mr. Manke again thanked the commissioners, but asked why do you have to do anything? If it's not broke...

Commissioner Taylor said it is broken. People are moving out; we need to keep the housing quality up. Mr. Manke replied they are moving out because Owosso has too many rules.

Commissioner Taylor stated that Owosso does have big problems with its housing and neighborhoods. Values are indicative of desirability and quality of life. The city is concerned with projecting values. Changes made to do so may not be for everybody and some people may need to look elsewhere for housing if they don't like the lifestyle of the city or the standards.

Commissioner Popovitch listed many reasons why she likes living in the city. We have to make the city a place where people want to live.

Mr. Zettel said public spaces are investing in your neighborhood – parks are important. If you don't have a large yard; the home is in bad shape; neighborhoods are in bad condition... What's the attraction?

Commissioner Popovitch suggested looking at a tax bill. Part of the taxes go to schools and the county.

Commissioner Kurtz said the process stated with the Master Plan which had the Place Making; work sessions; and gathering data which was driven by public comment.

Commissioner Renfrow reminded the gathering that the survey said the condition of public housing was very important.

**COMMISSIONER / PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Chairman Wascher stated the MSU students were working on S. Washington Street. Their presentation of recommendations will be coming soon regarding land uses and streetscaping on April 29.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

**MOTION BY COMMISSIONER KURTZ, SUPPORTED BY COMMISSIONER RENFROW, TO  
ADJOURN AT 8:28 P.M. UNTIL APRIL 22, 2013.  
YEAS ALL. MOTION CARRIED.**

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Melvin Renfrow, Secretary

mms