

November 12,

2024

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The Etna Township Zoning Commission met on Tuesday, November 12, 2024, in the Etna Township Hall, 81 Liberty Street, Etna, Ohio 43018 for the purpose of conducting a regular meeting. The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Litichia McIntyre.

Members Present

Adam Kelley, Dave Olson, Litichia McIntyre, Shelly Marie Ipacs, and Steven Smith

Members Absent

Others in Attendance
Holly Palumbo, Lance Schultz, Ted Walker, Gary Burkholder

1. Opening

a. Call to Order

b. Pledge of Allegiance

c. Roll Call

2. Adoption of Agenda

Recommended Action: Motion to adopt the agenda as presented

Moved by: Shelly Marie Ipacs

Seconded by: Dave Olson

Yes Adam Kelley, Dave Olson, Litichia McIntyre, Shelly Marie Ipacs, and Steven Smith

Carried 5-0

3. Announcements and Comments

4. New Business

The committee conducted a basic work session to discuss the meeting schedule for the remainder of the year. It was proposed to cancel the second meeting of November due to its proximity to Thanksgiving, as it was deemed unnecessary given the holiday preparations. All members agreed to this cancellation.

For December, Lance Schultz informed the committee of a likely agenda item for the first meeting. This includes a major modification request for the PMUD district involving outdoor storage. The staff is finalizing the language and preparing a report, which will be presented during the first December meeting. Recognizing the importance of this matter, the committee agreed to hold the first meeting as planned.

However, given the proximity of the second December meeting to Christmas and the busy holiday season, it was suggested to cancel that meeting as well. This proposal was unanimously approved by the members, considering that many would be engaged in holiday activities during that time.

Gary Burkholder provided updates on several key priorities and projects currently underway

The first priority discussed was filling vacancies on the Zoning Commission and the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA). There is one confirmed vacancy on each board, and although an existing member has requested reappointment, the positions will be publicly advertised to encourage broader participation. The township administrator will oversee this process.

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He highlighted the ongoing efforts to prepare the township's 2025 budget. A visiting fiscal officer has been hired to assist the current fiscal officer in navigating the complexities of the UAN software. A public work session with the trustees is planned for early December to finalize the budget. Efforts are also being made to schedule additional training for the zoning commission and BZA members in collaboration with the township's legal counsel. The status of a consultant for land use planning was another topic of discussion. While a proposal from McBride Dale had been considered, the majority of the Board of Trustees decided to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) for broader options. Examples of RFPs have been gathered, but the process has been delayed due to the administrator's workload. He acknowledged frustrations regarding the delays but emphasized the importance of moving this process forward to address development requests, zoning complaints, and overall township stabilization.

He also shared updates on several grants and infrastructure projects. An H2O grant has funded technology upgrades for monitoring road conditions to reduce salt usage, minimizing environmental impact. This includes bridge monitors and undercarriage spray systems for vehicles. A \$32,000 grant has also been secured for improved snowplow blades and related equipment.

On park development, efforts are ongoing to secure additional grant funding and reconvene the park district group, which had faced delays due to a consultant's personal leave. An event at Infirmary Park in Newark was noted as a potential opportunity to explore trail and playground equipment ideas for future park facilities.

Gary provided an update on Pike Street improvements, scheduled for spring 2026. Despite progress across various initiatives, he acknowledged that many projects are taking longer than anticipated, and he emphasized the township's commitment to keeping processes moving efficiently.

Lastly, Gary clarified that the Zoning Commission motioned on 9/24/2024 to send Steve Holloway, BZA Chair a request for clarification and full context of his own request to us asking we provide to him our definition of, "substantial," in regard to zoning.

Adam Kelley inquired about the progression of the wastewater plant project. Gary responded, noting that the Wagner plant is expected to be operational by late 2025 or spring 2026. The Gale Road plant is also undergoing an expansion, which is crucial for supporting local development. Both plants play a significant role in accommodating the area's growth.

Gary Burkholder mentioned that the district is expanding its governance by adding a new board member to include Jersey Township. Additionally, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) has initiated a 14-county study to better coordinate water and sewer systems. Other ongoing projects include collaboration with COTA to expand transit services into Licking County and efforts to address staffing needs, such as hiring a new Licking County administrator and recruiting a planning director.

A discussion followed regarding a proposed definition for "substantial," which was previously forwarded to the trustees for review. Members clarified that this recommendation was made during the September 24 meeting. Gary noted that there has been no response from the trustees or the prosecutor's office since the motion was made. He committed to following up with the township administrator to include this item on the agenda for the next trustee meeting on November 19.

Additional updates included infrastructure and grant-funded initiatives, with Gary expressing the need for better communication and efficiency in addressing procedural items. He acknowledged the delays and emphasized his support for defining "substantial" more precisely to enhance clarity in zoning resolutions.

Work session focused on preparing questions and identifying criteria to be considered during the search for a consultant

Adam Kelley provided an update on his review of the current code available on the township's website. He reported being about a quarter of the way through the document and mentioned discovering minor issues such as typos and outdated terminology. For example, the use of "coin-operated" in references to car washes and similar machines was flagged as potentially obsolete, given the prevalence of credit card or token-based systems. He suggested revisiting such

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definitions to better reflect current technology and practices. Adam offered to begin compiling a list of questions, article by article.

Shelly Marie Ipacs emphasized the importance of specifying criteria and detailed questions for the consultant. While the consultant will likely assess the code as a whole, Shelly Marie highlighted that identifying specific areas for attention, such as outdated terminology or structural inconsistencies, would help guide the consultant's focus.

The group acknowledged that the code contains language from the 1980s and 1990s, which necessitates a careful review to align with contemporary needs. There was an agreement that reviewing the code section by section would be beneficial. Adam proposed that this approach could help identify areas where definitions, placements, or provisions could be updated or clarified. The commission acknowledged an obvious need to update or recreate new maps and scour the code for references to, "coin operated...."

Shelly Marie Ipacs suggested assigning sections of the zoning code to individual members for review, an approach that had worked well previously. She also highlighted the alternative option of reviewing sections collectively as a group.

Litichia McIntyre expressed concern about redundancy, noting that the consultant will likely conduct a comprehensive review of the code and may identify sections that are no longer applicable. She questioned whether the group's efforts to review and analyze the code before the consultant's arrival might overlap unnecessarily with the consultant's work.

Lance Schiltz emphasized that the substantial work already completed by the planning and zoning commissions over the past year and a half would not be discarded. Instead, this work will be incorporated into the consultant's process. He suggested providing the consultant with a timeline and key recommendations from previous reviews to ensure that prior efforts are considered during the zoning code update. He also noted the importance of reconciling the zoning code with the land use plan and ensuring alignment between the two.

Discussion of the status of the comprehensive land use plan

Gary Burkholder asked whether members had reviewed the most current version, which is believed to be version six, dated September 11, 2023. Members expressed frustration that requested changes from earlier meetings had not been incorporated, and a promised online review link had not been provided. He assured the group that addressing these concerns and finalizing the comprehensive plan is a top priority. He committed to following up with Mr. Gray and the administrator to ensure all outstanding revisions are addressed and the updated plan is distributed.

The group acknowledged that the zoning code and comprehensive plan are interdependent and that progress on the comprehensive plan will facilitate the zoning code update. Lance reiterated that once the consultant is hired, they will provide detailed directions and assignments, ensuring a thorough and structured approach. The process is expected to take about a year and will involve significant effort to achieve a comprehensive, modernized code.

Litichia McIntyre raised concerns about the consultant's lack of responsiveness and suggested setting a firm deadline to ensure progress. She proposed scheduling a presentation by the consultant on January 21, 2025, allowing sufficient time for the consultant to address prior feedback and finalize the plan before the public open house.

Gary Burkholder agreed with the urgency, acknowledging the delays and frustration caused by the consultant's lack of follow-through. He emphasized the need to escalate pressure on the consultant and noted that the township had withheld the second payment to incentivize project completion. Gary also mentioned that the consultant had tentatively discussed holding a meeting in October, but it had not materialized due to scheduling conflicts with the new administrator's onboarding.

The group expressed agreement that the January 21 meeting could serve as a firm deadline for the consultant to deliver a complete presentation of the updated comprehensive plan. This presentation would also allow the trustees and the community to review and provide input before the public open house.

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Lance Schultz highlighted the importance of integrating the comprehensive plan with zoning updates, noting that the current zoning code, lacks the necessary provisions to manage upcoming development effectively. He suggested that once the comprehensive plan is finalized, it would serve as a foundation for the zoning update, ensuring future developments align with the township's goals.

Members also discussed the potential for accelerated growth due to Intel's expansion and upcoming improvements to sanitary plants. They emphasized the importance of having an updated comprehensive plan and zoning code to guide this development and maintain quality standards.

The group agreed to formally propose the January 21 meeting date to the trustees and the administrator, along with a clear directive for the consultant to present a finalized version of the comprehensive plan by that time. Litichia emphasized that this deadline would align with the anticipated hiring of a zoning consultant, allowing for a seamless transition into the zoning code rewrite process.

Selection of the next consultant

Steven Smith emphasized the need for clearer communication and accountability with future consultants, suggesting that questions about timelines, deliveries, and responsiveness be incorporated into the selection process. He stressed the importance of ensuring the township remains a priority and avoids being treated as a secondary client.

Shelly Marie Ipaes proposed including performance guarantees in the consultant's contract, such as limiting the number of ongoing projects they handle simultaneously, regularly sharing their information/work or updating the commission, and establishing a timeframe for deliverables. This suggestion was supported by several members, who agreed that such contractual provisions could prevent delays and ensure accountability.

Litichia McIntyre highlighted the need for a consultant who is dedicated to the township and engaged with the community. She noted the group's frustration with the current consultant's lack of responsiveness and proposed requiring the next consultant to attend meetings periodically to maintain consistent communication and collaboration.

Lance Schultz provided examples of consultants he had worked with previously, such as McBride Dale Clarion, who are known for their professionalism and adherence to timelines. He emphasized that experienced and reputable consultants typically meet deadlines and deliver high-quality results.

The group agreed that the next consultant should reflect the effort and dedication the commission has already invested in this process. Steven echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the substantial work the group has done over the years and the need for a consultant who values and builds upon that foundation.

Members reflected on their previous experiences with consultants in other contexts, noting that delays and lack of communication are atypical in their experience. Despite setbacks with the current consultant, the group remained optimistic that clear expectations and contractual safeguards would ensure a successful outcome with the next consultant.

MORPC Regional Study

Shelly Marie Ipaes asked Gary Burkholder for details about the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission's (MORPC) new 14-county study. He explained that the study aims to address projected population growth of 700,000–800,000 residents by 2050 and the need for comprehensive coordination of water, sewer, and infrastructure systems. MORPC is working with public and private partnerships, including Licking County and Johnstown, to create an orderly plan for infrastructure improvements. The study includes projects like the Route 161 connection to I-70 and transportation upgrades to key intersections.

Transportation Concerns

Gary highlighted the ongoing efforts to address transportation issues, including the Transportation Improvement District's focus on improving major intersections and planning for designated truck routes to mitigate residential impacts. Members noted long-standing traffic issues, particularly around schools, and the lack of sidewalks on Smoke Road and Columbia Road. Gary also reminded that critical need to improve the Columbia Road from Route 40 to Refugee. The absence of sidewalks with traffic to and from the school on the road makes that an especially dangerous route.

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Active Transportation and Connectivity

The conversation also touched on the need for an active transportation plan to improve walking and biking paths, particularly in light of the school district's revised busing policies. Gary stressed the importance of creating a safe pedestrian environment while ensuring development covers the cost of such infrastructure.

Comprehensive Plan Integration with Development

Gary reiterated the importance of completing the comprehensive plan and aligning it with infrastructure projects to manage the expected development boom. He emphasized the need for a modernized plan that protects the township's quality of life and preserves its rural character while accommodating growth. Members discussed the challenges of balancing development with farmland preservation, particularly concerning solar farms and their long-term impact on land use.

Future Infrastructure Planning

Gary proposed prioritizing reconstruction of Columbia Road as a major connector between Refugee Road and US 40, suggesting the inclusion of curbs, gutters, sidewalks, and a center turn lane. He stressed the importance of planning infrastructure improvements ahead of expected growth and ensuring developers contribute to connectivity.

Staff and Progress Updates

Members commended the township staff, including the trustees, BZA, and new administrator, for their hard work and dedication. Gary acknowledged the progress made in recent years, including addressing record-keeping issues and technology updates. He expressed optimism about the direction of the township and emphasized the importance of communication and collaboration between staff, trustees, and the commission.

5. Public Comments

Thaah Young, 9167 Taylor Rd, Etna

Intersection of Taylor Road and I-70:

Mrs. Young shared feedback from the Mayor of Reynoldsburg, who referred to the Taylor Road and I-70 intersection as "wasteland." She expressed concern about this perception, as the area is within Etna Township and has significant implications for future planning and development.

Open House for Comprehensive Plan:

Mrs. Young sought clarification on whether the January 21, 2025, date was intended for an open house or a consultant presentation. Litichia confirmed the open house was planned for that date to showcase the updated comprehensive plan and gather public feedback. Members emphasized the importance of having the finalized plan available at least a month prior to ensure thorough review and preparation.

Concerns about High-Density Housing in Comprehensive Plan:

Mrs. Young expressed reservations about the depiction of high-density housing near the Taylor and Main corridor in the comprehensive plan. She noted that while high-density housing may align with the plan's guidelines, it could inadvertently facilitate annexation by Reynoldsburg due to the lack of water infrastructure in western Etna Township. She highlighted how developers might use this to encourage incorporation into Reynoldsburg, which could undermine Etna Township's autonomy.

Infrastructure Challenges and Developer Influence:

Mrs. Young pointed out that Reynoldsburg is already leasing Etna Township land to run water to developments within its jurisdiction. This, she argued, could lead to more annexations if the township's comprehensive plan does not address infrastructure issues. She urged the board to consider how high-density zoning recommendations could align with infrastructure realities to avoid unintended consequences.

Corporate Welfare and TIFs:

Mrs. Young raised concerns about tax increment financing (TIFs) and other abatements, citing their impact on school funding and local resources. She suggested the board issue a public declaration or statement regarding their position on such incentives, particularly in response to increasing pressure from developers.

Implementation of Sidewalks and Community Improvements:

Mrs. Young highlighted challenges in implementing sidewalks, particularly along Main Street,

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due to existing underground utilities and stormwater infrastructure. She referenced funding from JED agreements and encouraged the board to propose meaningful projects that align with community needs and enhance quality of life.

Call for Broader Consideration During Pause:

During the interim period before the comprehensive plan is finalized, Mrs. Young recommended the board use this time to evaluate the broader implications of zoning and infrastructure planning. She emphasized the interconnectedness of zoning decisions with issues such as annexation, infrastructure, and community resources.

Board Response:

The board members clarified that the comprehensive plan serves as a guideline and does not dictate zoning changes. Rezoning requires property owner requests and board approval. The board acknowledged the importance of Mrs. Young's concerns and emphasized the need for coordinated efforts to balance development with infrastructure capabilities while preserving the township's identity.

Role of the Zoning Commission:

Litchia clarified the Zoning Commission's role as a recommending body, explaining that their responsibility is to propose recommendations, such as changes to the zoning resolutions and maps, to the Board of Trustees for final approval or denial. She emphasized that the comprehensive plan serves only as a guide, not as binding law.

Concerns About Annexation and High-Density Housing:

Mrs. Young raised concerns that the comprehensive plan's recommendations for high-density housing near Taylor Road and Main Street could inadvertently encourage annexation by Reynoldsburg, given the lack of water infrastructure in Ena Township. She highlighted that Reynoldsburg is actively leasing land in Ena to run water lines for its developments.

- Gary acknowledged that water infrastructure is a critical issue and noted that Ena Township's annexation agreement with Reynoldsburg allows property owners to pursue annexation. He suggested that the best way to deter annexation is for Ena Township to pursue its own developments.
- The group discussed the challenges posed by Reynoldsburg's focus on high-density housing as part of its strategy to address housing demands driven by regional growth.

Comprehensive Plan's Influence on Development:

Mrs. Young expressed concern that the current draft of the comprehensive plan, as displayed online, might signal a preference for high-density housing, making annexation and development decisions easier for Reynoldsburg. She urged the Zoning Commission to consider revising these recommendations to reflect Ena's vision and priorities.

Infrastructure and Connectivity Goals:

Mrs. Young highlighted the need for infrastructure improvements, including sidewalks and bike paths, to better connect areas within the township. She referenced the comprehensive plan's vision for a sidewalk extending from Taylor Road to the township hall as an example of how such improvements could enhance community connectivity.

- Litchia assured Mrs. Young that the open house for the comprehensive plan would provide an updated and detailed view of these proposals, addressing many of the concerns raised.

Recommendations for Next Steps:

Mrs. Young encouraged the commission to focus on infrastructure planning and explore options for providing water and other services to western Ena Township. She also suggested greater promotion of available land to potential developers to ensure that future growth aligns with the township's goals.

Board Response:

Litchia reiterated the importance of public feedback in shaping the comprehensive plan. They emphasized that the upcoming open house would provide an opportunity for the community to review and comment on updated proposals.

Gary stressed the need for proactive planning to address infrastructure challenges and mitigate annexation risks. He noted that high-density development is a recurring priority across the region

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due to housing demands but emphasized the township's commitment to balancing growth with quality of life.


6.

Adjournment

Recommended Action: To adjourn at 7:14 p.m.

Moved by: Steven Smith

Seconded by: Shelly Marie Ipacs



Holly Palumbo, Clerk



Litichia McIntyre, Chair