

Minutes: Russell Township Zoning Commission
Russell Fire-Rescue Station
April 24, 2013

Present: Richard E. Snyder, Chairman
Bruce Murphy
Donna Weiss Carson
Ben Kotowski
Tom Warren (arrived at 9:00 p.m.)
Diana Steffen

Also in attendance: Ric Machnics, Zoning Inspector.

Chairman Richard Snyder called the meeting to order at 7:37 p.m.

MINUTES OF MARCH 27, 2013 – *Mr. Murphy moved to accept the minutes as submitted, Ms. Weiss Carson seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by 4-0.*

OIL AND GAS ISSUES – Jeff Huntsberger, attorney with McDonald Hopkins, was in attendance at the invitation of the Chairman to clarify the situation with regard to drilling in the Utica shale in Ohio, and the likelihood of drilling in Geauga County and in Russell Township. Mr. Snyder said he has attended several seminars on the topic but found the data presented gave mixed results. The Commission is looking for guidance on how to educate residents and start a database where people can report their water well tests to have a baseline in case of damage in the future.

Jeff Huntsberger said that since the early 1980's much of his work at McDonald Hopkins has involved the oil and gas industry. The same source rock is being used as in the past but with new technology. This technology should protect the environment but there can be accidents that would destroy it. There will be considerable production of oil and gas products over the next 40 to 50 years, but the economics of it depends on the price of oil. It will not stop and will lead to more energy independence in the U.S.A.

Mr. Huntsberger said that aggregators obtained signed leases from landowners in eastern Geauga County in the last year and a half, and they have now moved on to new areas. Drilling may not occur in Geauga County for 2 to 10 years or more. There is one test well in Parkman Township, and if the contents were outstanding then Chesapeake would be developing it. However, such information is not disclosed. Chesapeake has sold its holdings in this area and is concentrating in counties farther south in Ohio, although the results there are not known since it takes months of production to evaluate. Mr. Huntsberger said the results of seismic testing along roads in Geauga County have not been released either, and results of drilling in 2012 have been given to O.D.N.R. which has not released them publicly yet.

As far as what will happen in this area, Mr. Huntsberger said his opinion is that it will be developed for oil and gas, as has happened before. He felt the threat to the environment is greater with the old, existing wells since they are shallower, older and are not maintained well. They are allowed to go no closer than about 500 feet from the boundary of the leased land. Asked about land with conservation easements, Mr. Huntsberger said drilling is not likely to be forced on land that is used by people, but he thought it could happen on other land that has been set aside for preservation by a landowner and a conservation agency. If the state thought it vital to drill on park district properties it could probably force the districts to allow it. The Western Reserve Land Conservancy is researching ways to work with the oil companies regarding placement of wells and best management practices, but is aware of the possibility of upsetting its supporters. The U.S. E.P.A. is looking into what is being done underground, and so far is more concerned when wells are fracked repeatedly rather than when they are only fracked once.

Further discussion involved the size of units, direction of drilling from wells, home insurance and mineral rights, the Bainbridge well explosion, and other fuel sources.

Mr. Machnics left the meeting at 8:40 p.m.

Mr. Huntsberger agreed it would be difficult to form a unit in areas where there are many small lots in Russell Township, but said it will depend on what is found under the ground. Drilling could happen in three years, or if there are other formations around the world that are of more interest, it may not happen for 30 to 40 years. He emphasized that education of residents is important before they sign a lease, and to be sure residents understand what is written in the older leases.

Mr. Snyder thanked Mr. Huntsberger for the information and for coming to speak with the Zoning Commission. Mr. Huntsberger left the meeting and Mr. Snyder called for a five-minute recess. Mr. Warren arrived at this time.

REVIEW DRAFT REPORT OF SURVEY FROM C.S.U. – Kathy Hexter had revised the report following discussion with the Commission at the previous meeting, and submitted the revised report on April 16th. Mr. Snyder asked the Commission if they had any comments, if anything needed to be corrected or removed from the report, or if there was anything the Commission would like to see in the final report. He said he would like to see the verbiage condensed, and some of the tables made into charts because charts are simpler to understand.

Ms. Weiss Carson said that one long comment from a resident is missing from the verbatim comments. Mr. Snyder said that was a raw draft and he noticed that there was a gap where the numbers appeared to jump from 200 to 350. This will be an appendix to the Guide Plan.

Mr. Snyder said he did not feel it necessary to break down many of the questions by the type of community people came from before moving to Russell.

The Commission agreed that residents' satisfaction with the quality of life has not changed much since 1994, and they still compared the Township favorably with other Geauga County communities. Mr. Warren commented that the results show that residents want officials to "stay the course", they were satisfied last time and are the same or more satisfied this time and want things to stay the same. Oil and gas drilling is the only major concern. The Commission agreed that due to the aging of the community some people would like more options for seniors but are not sure what type; this information should be turned over to the Board of Trustees. Mr. Murphy suggested some comments could be highlighted in the Guide Plan, and Mr. Warren suggested using Table 15, policy position on the need for more housing options by length of time lived in Russell Township.

Mr. Snyder said Mrs. Steffen will proofread the draft report and submit the document with mark-ups of typos, etc. to C.S.U. Ms. Weiss Carson asked that the verbatim comments be checked too.

Mr. Snyder said that C.S.U. had recommended not including the sections of the Township where the residents lived, in answer to the questions regarding quantity of water (tables 38 and 39). However, along the western edge of the Township there was more concern and he felt it was important to note that in the Guide Plan.

With regard to the numbers of residents who moved to Russell from other counties in Ohio and from other Geauga County communities, Mr. Snyder said the percentages shown need to be corrected and he will follow up with C.S.U.

The Commission discussed the public presentation of the survey report by C.S.U. It will be held in the Town Hall and will take approximately 40 minutes followed by a question and answer session. It was agreed to hold the meeting on May 28th or 29th, depending on which date works best for the Trustees. Ms. Weiss Carson strongly recommended having an evaluation sheet available for people to complete at the end of the meeting.

Action Items: Mr. Snyder will contact Kathy Hexter regarding changes agreed tonight. Ms. Weiss Carson will write a news release to send to the newspapers in time to be included three weeks ahead. Mr.

