A meeting of the Spring Lake Township Planning Commission was held at the Spring Lake Middle School, 345 Hammond St., Spring Lake, Michigan 49456.

A. **Call to Order**
   Latsch called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

B. **Approval of Agenda**
   Ketchum made a motion, supported by Tiles, to approve the agenda as presented. The motion was approved unanimously.

C. **Approval of Minutes**
   Clark made a motion, supported by Ketchum, to adopt the Planning Commission May 17, 2023 regular meeting minutes. The motion was approved unanimously.

D. **General Public Comments**
   A time for public comments was provided, for matters either on or not on the agenda.

   A commenter asked how a response could be made to the case presented by Eastbrook Homes in support of the R-2 Medium Density Residential re-zoning. The commenter further noted that at the public hearing on May 17, 2023, most of the comments were opposed to the proposed re-zoning, and the commenter wondered whether those negative comments were considered.

   A commenter stated a concern that the proposed re-zoning to the R-2 District has been awkward. He said he doesn’t understand what the Township approach is or what its purpose is.

   A commenter noted that she had just been asked to conserve water because of the drought. She wondered about the wisdom of adding more dwellings to the Township if the proposed R-2 re-zoning is approved. She also wondered whether the Smith’s Bridge would be adequate to serve the traffic for more dwellings.

   A commenter stated that the Planning Commission should stop delaying its denial of the proposed R-2 re-zoning.

   A commenter stated that the Planning Commission should follow the wishes of the people.
A commenter noted that in the recent revision of the master plan, Township residents gave a high priority to preserving rural areas. Therefore, he urged the Township to increase rural areas elsewhere in the Township if any other area of the Township is re-zoned for residential development.

A commenter urged the Planning Commission to deny the re-zoning because the community remains opposed to it.

A commenter stated that the property in question could not be re-zoned from the agricultural district to the rural residential district unless there was no agricultural use that could be conducted on the property.

Another commenter stated the Planning Commission must earn respect in order to receive respect.

Another commenter wondered how much fill soil would have to be brought in to develop the property in question if it is re-zoned to the R-2 District. The commenter acknowledged that the community does need housing.

A commenter expressed concern about stormwater. He indicated that stormwater tends to accumulate in his backyard.

A commenter stated that people in the Township are concerned with density and don’t want a dense residential development. He indicated that if the Township Board doesn’t listen, the next election will bring changes.

Another commenter stated that seeing pictures of Eastbrook Homes developments posted around the meeting area made her think that the Township had already made up its mind to grant the requested re-zoning.

With permission from Latsch, Bultje responded to a number of the comments. He noted that the comments reflected that many in the audience did not understand the re-zoning process.

Bultje noted that the re-zoning process is not based on a popularity contest. Even if most people in the community are opposed, the Planning Commission still must review the re-zoning factors in the Zoning Ordinance in order to make its recommendation to the Township Board regarding the re-zoning.

He indicated that if the Planning Commission would make its recommendation to the Township Board without going through the full procedure and giving the applicant full due process, the Planning Commission recommendation would likely be invalidated and set aside.

He indicated that once the public hearing has been closed, then the applicant will be given an opportunity to present its case for the re-zoning and to respond to the public comments.

He stated that there is no opportunity for rebuttal by the public at that point.
Bultje noted that even though there may be a temporary water shortage because of the drought, that does not mean that the public water system in the area is inadequate. Rather, the public water system is designed to meet normal conditions. It is not engineered or designed to meet extraordinary conditions.

He indicated that if the re-zoning is eventually approved, then the applicant would bring a planned unit development application to the Township. At that point, the details of the development would be discussed extensively, including road capacity, necessary fill, and disposition of stormwater.

Finally, Bultje noted that the decision by the applicant to post pictures of developments in the meeting area was simply that, a decision by the applicant. It was not a decision made by the Township and no intent should be ascribed to the Township because of those pictures.

E. Rambling Brook Homes – Re-Zoning Request from R-2 Medium Density Residential to R-4 High Density Residential

James Krueger presented this request on behalf of the applicant. He noted that the area in question is a transitional area and that more dense development would be appropriate. He indicated that the developer is contemplating five to eight four-plexes on the property in question. Retention ponds with berms would be provided, along with trees planted along the road. He indicated that one access road is preferred.

Ketchum noted that the property in question would, if re-zoned, be a nice transition for the various uses in the area.

Latsch opened the public hearing. There were no public comments. Ketchum moved to close the hearing. Clark seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Latsch lead the Planning Commission through the re-zoning criteria as specified in Section 109.B.7 of the Zoning Ordinance, and as discussed in the Memorandum from Hill dated June 12, 2023. By consensus, the Planning Commission found that all of the individual criteria in Section 109.B.7 of the Zoning Ordinance were satisfied.

Based on the Planning Commission’s discussion, and its consideration of the criteria in the Zoning Ordinance and the Hill Memorandum of June 12, 2023, Clark made a motion to recommend approval of the proposed re-zoning to the Township Board. The motion was supported by Tiles, and it passed unanimously with a roll call vote.

F. Re-Zoning Discussion of Approximately 250 Acres West of West Spring Lake Road and North of Van Wagoner and South of Hickory Street to the R-2 Medium Density Residential District

Mick McGraw and Mike McGraw of Eastbrook Homes, and Dan DeGroot of Exxel Engineering, presented on behalf of the proposed re-zoning of approximately 97 acres of the 250 acres proposed in total.
Mike McGraw indicated that Eastbrook Homes does not create housing demand, but does try to meet that demand. He said Eastbrook Homes does not buy property that does not meet the needs for residential development and is not appropriate for such development. He presented a slide presentation showing similar developments. He noted that the price range for the proposed dwellings would be approximately $500,000 to $800,000.

Mike McGraw indicated that there was no bidding war for the property in question. He said that the lessee farmer did not pursue purchase of the property in question even though the lessee farmer had a right to first refusal. When the lessee farmer did not exercise the right to purchase the property, then Eastbrook Homes pursued purchase. He said no other farmers were involved in the process for purchase of the property.

Mike McGraw noted that if the development is approved, the developer will pay for the infrastructure to serve the development, and then will pay to connect the development to the public water and public sanitary sewer systems.

Mike McGraw noted that the master plan process went on for two years with the Township. He said that it started before Eastbrook Homes ever talked with the property owner regarding the purchase of the 97 acres of blueberry farm. He noted that through the master plan process, the Township significantly increased the area proposed for rural residential, and significantly decreased the area in the Township proposed for medium density residential development. Mike McGraw noted that according to the master plan, medium density property would include single family dwellings served with public water and public sanitary sewer and would be located in the R-2 Zoning District. A medium density residential development should be walkable with access to sidewalks or bike paths. He said that the proposed development on the 97 acres in question will meet all of these requirements.

He said the proposed development on the property in question will include internal open space plus access to area parks.

Mike McGraw reviewed the re-zoning criteria in Section 109.B.7 of the Zoning Ordinance, and he stated that all of the criteria for a re-zoning request have been met in this instance. He specifically noted that the agricultural use of blueberry farming is no longer viable on this property because of foreign competition and diminishing soil viability. He also noted that the blueberry operations on the property in question have been the subject of various complaints from neighbors over the years.

Mike McGraw noted that the 97 acres proposed for re-zoning have already been cleared of trees. He said that the proposed development would add approximately 1,000 trees to the area.

Mike McGraw noted that a preliminary traffic study had already been done, which found that the roads in the area were adequate to accommodate the proposed development of the 97 acres. He said that a more detailed traffic study was in process.

DeGroot noted that when the re-zoning process is completed, and if the property is re-zoned, then the detailed design work for the development would be done. DeGroot noted that the developer
has already approached all of the agencies with jurisdiction over the property if it is developed. He noted that stormwater concerns would be addressed by the Ottawa County Water Resources Commissioner. He said that a team of professionals would review the drainage issues, and that monitoring wells would be maintained.

Mick McGraw stated that he has been in the housing industry for 51 years. He stated his goal is to build good homes and to be a good steward of the environment.

Hill noted that the details of the development were not on the agenda for this Planning Commission meeting. He stated that if the property is re-zoned, then the PUD process would be pursued. That process would take approximately a year and would include multiple public hearings.

Hill noted that regarding traffic, the Ottawa County Road Commission concluded the road capacity is adequate, although some intersection upgrades may be required.

Hill noted that Spring Lake Public Schools has decreased enrollment right now and has room for more students.

Hill reviewed the standards for re-zoning in Section 109.B.7 of the Zoning Ordinance, as also reviewed in his Memorandum of June 12, 2023.

Latsch reviewed the criteria in Section 109.B.7 of the Zoning Ordinance with the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission by consensus found that all of the standards for re-zoning were satisfied.

Latsch noted that the blueberry farm that had historically been located on the 97 acres in question is now surrounded by dwellings, leading to complaints regarding the agricultural operation.

Latsch further noted the lack of wetlands in the 97 acres. He stated that it is important that residential growth in the Township will not do harm to wetlands.

Ketchum noted that to re-zone the 97 acres in question to the R-1 District rather than the R-2 District would simply add to the cost of the dwellings, and therefore he would prefer that the property be re-zoned into the R-2 District.

Ketchum further indicated that he would prefer to recommend re-zoning just the 97 acres proposed by Eastbrook Homes at this point, and to not recommend re-zoning of the balance of the 250 acres initially proposed.

Clark indicated she agreed with Ketchum’s analysis.

Tiles acknowledged being torn between recommending re-zoning the 97 acres to either the R-1 Zoning District or the R-2 Zoning District.

Ketchum made a motion to direct Township staff to prepare a written report, recommending to the Township Board that the 97 acres owned by Eastbrook Homes be re-zoned to the R-2 Zoning District.
District, and that the balance of the 250 acres remain zoned as it is now, to be addressed at a later date when necessary. Clark seconded the motion, which passed unanimously with a roll call vote.

G. **Zoning Ordinance Text Amendments – Neighborhood Commercial District – Multi Family Dwellings**

Hill presented his Memorandum dated June 9, 2023 concerning proposed Zoning Ordinance text amendments for the Neighborhood Commercial District, specifically to allow multi family dwellings. Tiles moved to recommend the proposed text amendments to the Township Board for approval. Ketchum seconded the motion, which passed unanimously with a roll call vote.

H. **Commissioner Comments**
1. Township Board: There was no Township Board report.
2. ZBA: Ketchum reviewed the latest ZBA meeting.
3. Community Development Director: No report.

I. **Adjournment**

Ketchum moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:15pm. Latsch seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Jack Ketchum, Secretary
Planning Commission