

Minutes of the Gaines Charter Township Planning Commission

Regular Meeting held August 28th, 2025, at 7 pm

8555 Kalamazoo Ave., SE, Caledonia, MI 49316

MEMBERS PRESENT: Rober, Waayenberg, Wiersema, Giarmo, Thomas

MEMBERS ABSENT: Haagsma and Billips, with notice

STAFF PRESENT: Dan Wells, Community Development Director; Dakota Swan, Assistant Planner

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair Giarmo called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

II. CONSIDERATION OF MEETING AGENDA

III. CONSIDERATION OF MEETING MINUTES

Consideration of the July 24th, regular Planning Commission meeting minutes.

Motion: Motion by Rober, supported by Wiersema to approve the minutes of July 24th, 2025, with corrections.

DISCUSSION:

AYES: All

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

DECISION: Motion Carried (5-0)

IV. INQUIRY OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

1. Public Hearings

a. 3429 Loretta View SE – Special Use Permit – Accessory Building

Brad Miedema, the property owner and applicant, explained that he is seeking a Special Use Permit to construct a 15,000 square-foot accessory building. The intent is to use the accessory building as a sports facility for their family; the building is planned to include a full-sized baseball infield, a weight room, gymnastics area, and basketball court. Miedema explained that his family is relocating from California where they are used to doing sports outside year-round. They will be constructing a new home on the parcel as well.

Community Development Director Dan Wells noted a correction on the staff memo, as this project is being requested in the Agricultural/ Rural-Residential zoning district. Wells noted that the site plan also includes a sauna, golf simulator, cold storage, and a kitchen/ bar area upstairs. Properties in the A/RR zoning district are limited to 5,000 square feet of accessory buildings; the proposed building is three times as large as what would be permitted by right, hence the request for a Special Use Permit.

Planner Wells then gave an overview of the applicable standards of review from Sections 18.20.A.9 of the Zoning Ordinance, which pertain to oversized accessory buildings, and Section 27.40 which pertain to all special land uses.

Standard 27.40.B aims to ensure that the proposed special use is compatible with other uses in the surrounding area; staff found this standard to be undetermined since the surrounding area is mainly rural and characterized by wood lots and open fields. Although some accessory buildings in the vicinity are similar in scale, they are largely used in agricultural ventures.

27.40.D intends to ensure that there will not be any form of nuisance that could arise from the special use and was found to be undetermined by staff. Although no noise or smells will come from the building, the visual impact could be considered a nuisance to some. Wells noted that the architectural committee for Loretta View Drive has reviewed and approved the proposed building, and that public notices were sent to every address within 300 feet of the subject parcel, so any aggrieved parties were made aware of the public hearing and the opportunity to address their concerns to the Planning Commission.

27.40.E addresses environmental concerns associated with the special use; staff found this standard to be met. Planner Wells noted that he spoke with the Township Engineer about this project to ensure that water will not run off onto anyone else's property. Although residential properties are exempt from stormwater regulations, it has been taken into consideration.

27.40.G aims to ensure that approving the request would not set precedent for development that could potentially have adverse effects on the plans and policies of the Township in the future. Staff found this standard to be undetermined solely due to the size of the proposed building. The 2023 Master Plan designates this parcel as rural, and being characterized by natural woodlots, open fields, livestock, prairie, and limited residential development. If residential development occurs in these types of areas, the Master Plan advises that it should be sparse.

With regard to the standards of approval for oversized accessory buildings outlined in Section 18.20.A.9, Planner Wells noted that the Planning Commission must determine whether the visual impact of the building will be overly obtrusive, and whether the architectural character of the building is consistent with other accessory buildings in the area, in addition to the home on the parcel. Wells added that with regard to future development, Loretta View would be required to be upgraded to a major private street should a

future property owner be interested in dividing and selling off pieces of the subject parcel for new construction.

Chair Giarmo opened the public hearing.

Bob Pylman of 3432 Loretta View, the neighbor directly to the west of the subject parcel, stated that he thinks the building is too tall, and the scale of the project feels overly gross, as homes on the drive are not even close to the scale of the building. Although Pylman appreciates what Miedema is providing his children through this request, Pylman said that he feels as though this would be “overpowering our neighborhood”. Pylman also expressed concern about the adverse effects construction traffic may have on the road; Planner Wells responded that a road maintenance agreement is in place to ensure that if individuals are responsible for damage, they will be held accountable.

Chair Giarmo closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Wiersema began discussion by stating that he is concerned about the size of the building despite the subject parcel being large enough to adequately accommodate the building. Although the Planning Commission has approved several large accessory buildings, none have been this large. Wiersema stated that this building “is almost a warehouse”. Miedema has noted that the building is intended to be used privately and only by his family, however, Wiersema inquired about what protection the Township may be able to put in place to prevent a future homeowner from using the space commercially. Planner Wells noted that commercial use in a residential zoning district would be prohibited, and that the building would be permitted to be used for residential storage purposes. Wiersema added that he is concerned that this request is misaligned with the intent and goals of the Master Plan.

Commissioner Waayenberg said that although the building is obscenely large, he is not in staunch opposition to the project, noting that he “love[s] big pole barns”. Waayenberg did, however, pose the question of what may happen to the building in 10-12 years after Miedema’s children would likely no longer be using the building for sports training; he noted that if there was a commercial operation being run in the building, he is certain the association on Loretta View would catch on. Although the building is large, Waayenberg noted that the subject parcel is also very large and absorbs the scale of the building. With regard to setting poor precedence for future development, Waayenberg added that if someone with a far smaller piece of land came to the Planning Commission seeking a similarly sized building, approving this request could potentially expose the Planning Commission into having to approve a request as such. Waayenber inquired about a timeline for construction of the building, to which Planner Wells responded that no permits for the accessory building would be issued until permits for the home are issued.

Commissioner Thomas echoed Waayenberg’s concerns and agreed that Miedema’s intent is admirable, however, her concerns are down the road. Thomas noted that a future homeowner could desire a different use for a building of this size, which may be incompatible with zoning requirements and regulations.

Vice Chair Rober agreed that this is an incredible gift for Miedema’s children, and that 9 acres of land is suitable to absorb the scale of the building, however, she is unsure about how the neighborhood would react. Waayeneberg added that since this is an interior lot without frontage on a primary road, screening is enhanced. Thomas said she has no doubts that the construction will be well done and aesthetically pleasing, however, her concern is the use of the building in 10-12 years – Rober agreed and added that she is also concerned about the size of the building.

Chair Giarmo inquired about the size of the home that will be built; Miedema responded that the home will be 5,200 square feet. Giarmo noted that the proposed accessory building is about three times the size of the home. Rober noted that since the subject parcel is quite far back from Hanna Lake, it's unlikely that the building will be visible from the right-of-way.

Planner Wells noted that staff found the landscaping plan provided to be rather minimal; increased landscaping could help to soften the visual impact of such a large building. Wells asked that should a motion to approve be made, landscaping requirements should be discussed further.

Chair Giarmo inquired about what the building and home will look like; Miedema responded that the home will be two-stories with stonework on the exterior, and that they are attempting to emulate architectural elements inspired by "French countryside" homes. Miedema added that the accessory building is planned to match the home in color but will not feature the same stonework.

Vice Chair Rober noted that some smaller houses in the Township have three car garages and also may be considered disproportionate with the home; Planner Wells explained that the Zoning Ordinance limits the square footage of attached garages to being 50% of the ground floor square footage. Chair Giarmo said that the notion of setting bad precedence does not concern her as much as it used to, since the Planning Commission reviews requests as such on a case-by-case basis, but that she would feel more comfortable if the proposed building was smaller. She added that the Planning Commission should decide whether they are comfortable with the scale of the building before they consider landscaping or other furnishings.

Commissioner Wiersema said that he would be uncomfortable with approving this request. Waayenberg stated that he's not necessarily opposed to the request, but he is not keen on making the motion to approve the project either due to the scale of the building.

MOTION: Motion by Waayenberg, supported by Rober, to postpone the request for a Special Use Permit for an accessory building at 3429 Loretta View Drive, due to standards of review being undetermined and due to the absence of two Planning Commissioners.

DISCUSSION: The Planning Commissioners in attendance at the August meeting agreed that they would prefer to discuss this request with all members present.

AYES: ALL

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

DECISION: Motion Carried (5-0)

2. Site Plan Review

a. None

3. Items not requiring a Public Hearing

a. 4645 100th Street – Resolution to Revoke Special Use Permit

At the July regular meeting of the Planning Commission, the Planning Commission voted unanimously to revoke a Special Use Permit issued for a home occupation due to conditions of the permit not being abided by. The applicant and Township Attorney both requested a formal resolution be created.

MOTION: Motion by Waayenberg, supported by Rober, to revoke the Special Use Permit for a home occupation at 4645 100th Street SE.

DISCUSSION: None

AYES: ALL

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

DECISION: Motion Carried (5-0)

b. Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment – LED Message Centers in SR Zoning District

Planner Wells explained that this request was for an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance to allow for ECM signs in residential zoning districts for institutional uses, such as schools and churches. The Township Board of Trustees considered this request at their most recent meeting, held on August 11th, 2025, at which they referred the request back to the Planning Commission for further review and deliberation. Under the old Zoning Ordinance, ECM's were permitted in residential zoning district so long as a Special Use Permit was obtained; the updated Zoning Ordinance prohibits ECM's in residential zoning districts, as the steering committee that worked on the ordinance update found them to be a nuisance. Feedback from the community captured during the 2023 Master Plan update indicate that overly obtrusive lighting is also a concern for residents. Wells noted that the biggest concerns are light spill, glare, and a lack of shielding for ECM's. Staff provided language from the Zoning Ordinance on both signage and lighting to guide the discussion on this request, since the two chapters aren't entirely compatible; something that would be permissible under the lighting ordinance may not be allowed under the sign ordinance. Wells noted that there is overlap between the two chapters, and although the Zoning Ordinance steering committee did thoroughly consider all updates to the ordinance, these two chapters were not necessarily considered in conjunction with one another.

Chair Giarmo said that enforcement and holding users accountable to all stipulations for ECM's would be tricky, as there are several elements that are regulated; staff would likely be overburdened with enforcement efforts. Giarmo also noted that she appreciates the Township Board's concern, as most of what they are seeing is not permitted. Commissioner Waayenberg suggested that perhaps it could be as simple as requiring the lighting ordinance to be entirely compatible with the sign ordinance.

Planner Wells stated that staff does have the ability to measure candlepower at the edge of the property to monitor light spill and encourage owners to dim the display until there is no reading at property lines, however, this would likely be overburdensome for staff currently.

Chair Giarmo highlighted the fact that the updated Zoning Ordinance has only been in effect since April of 2025, and that it has not been a sufficient amount of time to see how the ordinance is really working. Wells noted that the Township Board did acknowledge the positive impact of allowing this type of signage in residential areas, as they provide good messaging opportunities for schools and churches; Wells said that they do provide a certain kind of service to the community.

Giarmo said that she would hate to see institutional uses have no avenue to implement these kinds of signs as they do have positive impacts, however, she noted that “our residents were clear” that they were concerned with excessive lighting in residential areas during the public input phase of the 2023 Master Plan update. Waayenberg noted that ECM’s aren’t necessarily banned outright in the Township, rather, they are strategically restricted only in certain areas.

Chair Giarmo inquired with Planner Wells, asking if he got the sense that the Township Board was eager or not to make this modification to the Zoning Ordinance. Wells said that his impression was that the Township Board had mixed opinions on this topic; some trustees seemed amenable to the idea so long as the right restrictions were in place, such as requiring them to be 200 feet from residential structures and other requirements to minimize light spill. Wells explained that in its simplest form, this is a question for the Planning Commission of whether they want to allow ECM’s in residential zoning districts or not. Section 24.80 of the Zoning Ordinance has the same requirements for permanent signs across all residential zoning districts; Planner Wells pointed this out and noted that each residential district doesn’t necessarily have its own set of signage requirements.

Wiersema asked Planner Wells, hypothetically, if a church purchased a piece of property and wanted to use an ECM for their signage, the current ordinance would not allow them to have this kind of signage; Planner Wells confirmed this and noted that they would be permitted to use a channel lit internally or externally illuminated sign, but no LED’s would be allowed to be used in the display. Chair Giarmo said that the Township needs to be able to trust its regulations and trust that people follow them; staff is unable to chase down signs to the extent that would be necessary, and Giarmo noted that this would likely be an inefficient use of staff time.

Wiersema noted that if an institution bought a large piece of property and requested an ECM, it likely wouldn’t be overly obtrusive as a large property would buffer any light spill. Giarmo responded that with a Special Use Permit, the Planning Commission would have the authority and ability to consider factors as such for individual instances.

Giarmo requested that staff look at both the sign and lighting ordinances to look for inconsistencies that may need to be changed to help with enforcement issues that may arise from issuance of a Special Use Permit for electronic messaging centers. Wells responded that staff can certainly do that, however, he lacks confidence that such review will inform the decision. Staff could modify the sign ordinance to include language that stipulates light emitted by LED’s must be 0 at property lines, since this is the only means of regulation that would be enforceable with the use of a light meter.

MOTION: Motion by Rober, supported by Waayenberg, to direct staff to modify the ordinance to include restrictions for light levels at property lines in residential areas, to only make ECM’s available to institutional users in residential zoning districts with the issuance of a Special Use Permit, and to create consistency between the lighting and signage ordinances.

DISCUSSION: None
AYES: ALL
NAYS: None
ABSTAIN: None
DECISION: Motion Carried (5-0)

VII. GENERAL DISCUSSION

Wiersema inquired about the status of the Brewer Park Apartments; Wells responded that last year the developer requested and obtained a site plan extension, and that they are anticipated to start construction this fall.

Wiersema also noted that the utility units on the roof of the new Pine Rest Pediatric Center are unsightly, and encouraged the Planning Commission to be cautious about such aesthetic considerations.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:06 PM.

I hereby certify that the above is a true copy of the minutes from the August 28th, 2025, Planning Commission Meeting of the Gaines Charter Township Planning Commission held at the time and place mentioned above pursuant to the required statutory procedures.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lani Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Lani Thomas,

Secretary

Gaines Charter Township Planning Commission

Date: September 25, 2025