

Minutes of the Gaines Charter Township Planning Commission

Regular Meeting held November 20th, 2025, at 7 pm

8555 Kalamazoo Ave., SE, Caledonia, MI 49316

MEMBERS PRESENT: Rober, Haagsma, Giarmo, Thomas, Billips

MEMBERS ABSENT: Wiersema and Waayenberg, 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

The agenda was approved as presented.

III. CONSIDERATION OF MEETING MINUTES

Consideration of the October 23rd, 2025, regular Planning Commission meeting minutes.

Motion: Motion by Haagsma, supported by Rober to approve the minutes of October 23rd, 2025.

DISCUSSION:

AYES: All

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

DECISION: Motion Carried (5-0)

IV. INQUIRY OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

Allen Bacon of Consumers Energy explained that he is the Engagement Manager for Consumers and is the Township's point of contact for anything electricity related. Bacon has offered to host an informal meeting with elected officials, appointed officials, and any staff that may be interested in learning more about electrical distribution and rate setting.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

1. Public Hearings

a. Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment – Electronic Messaging Centers in Residential Zoning Districts

Planner Wells explained that this request for a text amendment to the Zoning Ordinance is intended to allow institutional users in residential zoning districts to have electronic changeable messaging centers with a special use permit. The Township Board had their first hearing and review of the request on November 10th and set a public hearing for their regularly scheduled meeting on December 8th, 2025; the Township Board is waiting to receive a resolution and positive recommendation from the Planning Commission prior to the scheduled public hearing.

Wells noted that in the large update to the Zoning Ordinance, which was approved and adopted in April of 2025, ECM's were no longer designated as a permitted use in residential zoning districts; the applicant for this request is looking to reinstate this use in residential zoning districts through the special use permit process. Both the Planning Commission and Township Board found it appropriate to limit the hours of operation although this was not included in the initial request; ECM's in residential zoning districts will now be required to be shut off from 10 PM to 7 AM.

Chair Giarmo opened the public hearing and closed the public hearing.

Motion:	Motion by Haagsma, supported by Billips to make a positive recommendation to the Township Board for the request for a text amendment to the Zoning Ordinance which will allow ECM's in residential zoning districts for institutional users with a special use permit, in which hours will be restricted, and ECM's must be off from 10 PM to 7 AM.
DISCUSSION:	Vice Chair Rober inquired about whether there is a specific deadline for when a user must swap out an existing message for a new one; Planner Wells explained that rarely does the Township regulate messages displayed on ECM's so as to not infringe upon the First Amendment and right to free speech.
AYES:	All
NAYS:	None
ABSTAIN:	None
DECISION:	Motion Carried (5-0)

b. 2844 100th Street – Special Use Permit – Ground Mounted Solar Array

Dave Van Haitsma, the applicant and builder for this request, was joined by Greg Oliver from Agathon Solar to explain the request for a special use permit to allow for an oversized ground mounted solar array to be constructed at 2844 100th Street. Oliver explained that the 8,880 square-foot array uses

panels that are designed and feature a coating which absorbs light and reduces glare, and the applicant intends to generate electricity via the panels to power the home on site. Since the proposed array is over 1,500 square feet, the applicant must obtain a special use permit. Planner Wells noted that the power generated on site may be used to power other elements on the parcel besides the home, and the Township has no ability to regulate what power is used for or where it may go on site.

Oliver clarified that the fixtures for the panels will be hot dipped galvanized steel to protect them from the elements, and although the fixtures will be grey, the applicant intends to implement screening to assist in buffering the view from neighboring properties. Van Haitsma noted that he would be happy to work with a neighbor who submitted a public comment concerning the view to achieve appropriate screening.

With regard to noise, Oliver noted that the panels do not emit any noise, and any noise would be generated from a small electrical room already existing on the parcel. Consumers Energy is responsible for inspecting the system and determining whether infrastructure in the area needs to be updated to accommodate the system or protect the system in the event of a power surge.

Chair Giarmo inquired about the provided landscape plan and whether there was a more detailed depiction of the landscaping being proposed, as the provided plan does not specify species or planting distances. Van Haitsma responded that the owners intend to make sure necessary screening is installed by enhancing the existing berm on the north side of the property and planting several additional evergreen trees – Van Haitsma stated that the applicant is willing to make the screening “as thick as we need it to be” to reduce nuisance for neighboring properties. Chair Giarmo expressed hesitancy, as this is a significant area to be screened, and typically the Planning Commission prefers a detailed landscaping plan to help inform their deliberation.

Chair Giarmo opened the public hearing.

Ron Whitwam of 2889 100th Street noted that he is not concerned about the quality of the work associated with this project, however, he does have concerns about the view from his home. Whitwam expressed that he would like to see the proposed row of evergreen trees extended to buffer the view from his home as well. Planner Wells said that he would be willing to make a site visit with Whitwam and Van Haitsma to ensure screening will be adequate.

Jason Prins of 2859 100th Street stated that although he is in full support of the homeowner using the property as they please, he is also concerned with visual obstruction.

Chair Giarmo closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Haagsma said that if the screening is executed appropriately, he is okay with approving the request, although he would’ve liked to see a more descriptive landscaping plan. Haagsma agreed that screening needs to be extended further east and further south along the driveway. Haagsma also noted that the tilt of the panels is directed to the south, in the direction of the home, meaning that any glare produced from the panels will not be facing outward towards any neighboring properties.

Commissioner Rober agreed that screening is of utmost importance with this request and encouraged the applicant to ensure that screening is done well. Thomas agreed that although a better visual of the landscaping plan would be nice, she is comfortable with the applicant working with staff to ensure

adequate screening. Chair Giarmo stated that she is comfortable with moving forward with administrative support on the landscaping requirements, and Commissioner Billips added that she is glad to hear neighbors are supportive of this project.

Motion: Motion by Haagsma, supported by Thomas to approve the request for a special use permit at 2844 100th Street SE to allow for a 8,880 square-foot ground mounted solar array with the following conditions:

1. The applicant must adhere to all feedback and requirements from the Township Engineer and Township Building Official.
2. The applicant must work with staff and neighbors to verify and ensure satisfaction of screening and landscaping needs.

AYES: ALL

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

DECISION: Motion Carried (5-0)

2. Site Plan Review

a. 4200 60th Street – Switch Phase II Substation – Site Plan Extension

Planner Wells explained that Switch is seeking a site plan extension for an electrical substation that was originally approved in October of 2024. Kevin Wilks, the applicant and engineer for this project, explained that the extension is being requested due to delays associated with obtaining wetland permits from EGLE.

Motion: Motion by Haagsma, supported by Rober to approve the site plan extension request.

DISCUSSION:

AYES: All

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

DECISION: Motion Carried (5-0)

b. Prairie Wolf Station – Senior Living Facility

Eric DeYoung of Nederveld, the applicant for this request, explained that the application for site plan approval is for the senior living facility within the Prairie Wolf Station PUD. In July, a Consent Judgement dictating the nature of the project was amended to swap the location of the senior living facility from the northern lot to the southern lot on the west side of the property. The Consent Judgement is currently waiting to be reviewed and approved by a judge, and the request for site plan approval is contingent on receiving approval from a Judge in the 17th Circuit District Court.

DeYoung explained that the facility features three types of units; independent living, assisted living, and memory care. The building will feature visual elements that make for an interesting, cohesive design, and the northern terminus of the building will feature a café to fulfill mixed-use requirements in the Village Residential zoning designation. The building will provide pedestrian access to a comprehensive sidewalk network that spans throughout the whole project, and will feature a patio, covered canopy towards the entrance for pick-ups and drop-offs, and bollard lighting to improve the pedestrian experience and enhance the overall streetscape. Utility details have been reviewed by the Township Engineer and the Fire Department, and construction plans are subject to review / must adhere to all feedback provided by both entities.

Planner Wells noted that the building will be approximately 75,000 square feet, and all specifications of the site plan are consistent with the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance. Parking calculations for the building were rather complex, as the applicant had to calculate parking based on the amount of square footage dedicated to apartments, senior living, and the mixed-use café element; furthermore, requirements for ADA-compliant and barrier-free spaces have also been satisfied. Wells pointed out that the landscaping plan is also compliant with the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance, and the applicant will ensure that overhead utility lines will not be obstructed by trees associated with the project.

Wells added that the only peculiar element about this request for site plan approval is that EGLE has required the developer to preserve a wetland on the western edge of the property, which restricts the buildable area. Mike Wagner of Leo Brown Group, the firm designing the senior living center, explained that Leo Brown Group has restored wetlands in the past and is interested in doing that for this project, and is hoping that EGLE will find a way to work with their desires for the project. Wells also said that signage plans have not been received but will need to be reviewed administratively, and the applicant will be required to obtain all outside agency approvals. Staff is recommending approval of the site plan review based on all applicable standards being met.

Commissioner Billips inquired about pricing of senior living units; Wells responded that the units in the facility will be market rate and will vary depending on the type of unit one is seeking.

Chair Giarmo inquired about widening the proposed sidewalk as a precautionary measure for years down the line when the multimodal path will get plenty of use – DeYoung responded that the sidewalk within the development can be made wider, however, the proposed sidewalk matches the width of the sidewalk along Kalamazoo Avenue, which is 5 feet wide. Chair Giarmo said that the goal is ultimately to have sidewalk all the way down Kalamazoo Avenue eventually, and explained that she is hesitant that a smaller sidewalk may have negative consequences later down the line when the site is established and it is being well used. Commissioner Haagsma noted that sidewalk on the western side of Kalamazoo is between 8 to 10 feet wide, and he believes a 5-foot-wide sidewalk would be adequate. Commissioner Billips added that she appreciates that the facility has been designed to accommodate residents through various levels of care.

MOTION: Motion by Haagsma, supported by Billips to approve the site plan for the Senior Living Facility in the Prairie Wolf Station PUD located at 8460 Kalamazoo Avenue with the following conditions:

1. Building permits may only be obtained after approval of the first amendment to the consent judgement currently under consideration by the 17th Circuit Court in Kent County.
2. Signage will be reviewed administratively
3. Secure all Township department and outside agency approvals
 - a) Township Engineer/ BGUA
 - b) Fire Department
 - c) Kent County Road Commission (access and SESC)
 - d) Kent County Drain Commission
 - e) Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy

DISCUSSION: None.

AYES: ALL

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

DECISION: Motion Carried (5-0)

3. Items not requiring a Public Hearing

a. 2026 Meeting Schedule

MOTION: Motion by Rober, supported by Thomas to approve the 2026 Meeting Schedule

DISCUSSION: None

AYES: ALL

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

DECISION: Motion Carried (5-0)

VII. GENERAL DISCUSSION

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:06 PM.

CERTIFICATION:

I hereby certify that the above is a true copy of the minutes from the November 20th, 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 cursive script that reads "Lani Thomas". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Lani Thomas,

Secretary

Gaines Charter Township Planning Commission

Date: December 18, 2025