

**LOWELL CHARTER TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION  
PUBLIC HEARING AND SPECIAL MEETING  
SEPTEMBER 25, 2006**

**PRESENT:** Clements, Sanford, Simmonds, Batchelor, Blumm

**PLANNER:** Tim Johnson – MainStreet Planning

**CITIZENS IN ATTENDANCE:** 17

The public hearing before of the Lowell Charter Township Planning Commission was commenced by Chairperson Simmonds at 7:02 p.m. Mr. Simmonds explained the procedures for public hearing to those present.

**PUBLIC HEARING FOR ROANOKE RANCH SPECIAL LAND USE**

The Planning Commission secretary read the published notice for the public hearing.

LeRoy Johnson presented for Roanoke Ranch, distributing copies of the August 21, 2006 Summary of Request for Special Use Permit, which the Lowell Charter Township Planning Commission had previously received, to members of the public present. He explained that 200 acres on the Grand River would be used for a horse camp for underprivileged children for about six weeks during the summer, twice a week for a half day. He reported that the access drive had recently been re-cindered, and that estimated traffic would be buses of children twice a day two days a week, and up to 10 volunteers in private cars. Mr. Johnson indicated that Roanoke Ranch would operate as a 501(c)(3) not for profit organization.

Tim Johnson summarized his June 12, 2006 letter to Aaron Decker of Roanoke Ranch for Kids, and his September 21, 2006 report to the Lowell Charter Township Planning Commission on the Application. Among the concerns expressed by Mr. Johnson were the width of the access drive, a railroad crossing the drive, and emergency vehicle access to the property.

Ms. Blumm asked for details about the railroad crossing, and expressed the need to review the change in use of the property with the railroad, based on her experience with a nearby township park. She also expressed caution about allowing camping trailers to stay overnight on the property. Finally she raised concerns about lighting at special events, and activities continuing very late into the evening. She concluded by expressing her general support of the use requested, which would maintain a large greenspace in the area.

Ms. Blumm noted that separate permits would be required for special events, even if the special land use were allowed.

Mr. Batchelor did not find overnight camping to be unreasonable. He felt this was a good place for this type of land use, but he did express concern about the slope of the driveway up to the road.

Mr. Sanford noted that there was good sight distance either way from the driveway where it met the road.

Mr. Simmonds asked why the initial application indicated 191 acres of land, but Tim Johnson's letter indicated 55 acres. Mr. Johnson indicated that they would be working with the kids only on the 55 acres.

Mr. Clements asked if the events would be limited to summer months, and was told that they would be.

There being no other questions from members of the Planning Commission, the meeting was opened to public comment at 7:25 pm.

Duane Nederhoed asked about hours of operation, indicating that he lived across from the property and that he would like the hours of events and cleanup activities to be limited. Mr. Johnson replied that activities would usually be during normal business hours, and occasionally on weekends during daylight hours. There may be two to four special events during the year, some after dark, but not continuing to 3 am (there having been activity on the property at that hour recently).

Trent Buck indicated that he had been surprised and impressed by the space available and events planned, and that such a facility would make a difference in the lives of disadvantaged kids. He supported the Application.

David Pachelski indicated that he knew both LeRoy Johnson and Applicant Aaron Decker, that they both have high success rates and integrity, and that they would operate the ranch professionally.

Aaron Decker indicated his desire to give back to the community, and his desire to help with preservation activities along the adjoining river.

Mike Doyle, owner of the property in question, indicated his full support for the program and his belief that the program would be run properly.

Mike Seilof provided the Planning Commission with a list of eleven 'Unanswered Issues and Questions' concerning the application under consideration, and briefly summarized many of those issues and questions.

Sandra Miles thought the camp was a good idea, but had some concerns about expansion of the program to include adults and possible future requests to operate year round rather than just during summer months.

Mr. Seilof added his concern about which buildings on the property would be used, and which might be added, and also his concern about the nearness of a parking area to the river and possible runoff pollution resulting from vehicle drippings.

Sue Groom expressed concern about camping and possible sewage risk in areas of the property within the flood plain. Her concerns included the impact of growth of the program, restroom facility demands of special events, driveway usage particularly in winter months, signage plans, and licensing of supervisors of the children.

Mr. Seilof commented further on funding of Roanoke Ranch, and past donations by them to non-local charitable activities. He feels this is a good idea generally but not for this area.

There being no further questions or comments offered, the public comment portion of the public hearing concluded at 8:47 p.m.

## **SPECIAL MEETING**

The special meeting of the Lowell Charter Township Planning Commission was begun at 7:48 p.m.

### **DISCUSSION OF ROANOKE RANCH FOR KIDS APPLICATION:**

Mr. Simmonds asked for clarification on whether special event permits were a part of the consideration of the special land use. Tim Johnson indicated the Clerk could issue special event permits on request at any time, and the only common element was the property and people involved.

Mr. Simmonds asked if Mr. Decker had received the emailed report of Tim Johnson September 22<sup>nd</sup>, and he indicated he had not received that report. Mr. Simmonds then reviewed the comments in that email.

Comment 1 was informational.

Comment 2 concerned the access drive. Aaron Decker is to provide the Planning Commission with a letter from the fire marshal confirming that the drive is adequate for emergency vehicle access.

Comment 3, concerning ownership of the access drive, was resolved when Charles Harrington, owner of the drive, indicated his approval of it's use by additional vehicles.

Comment 4 concerned the upward slope of the drive where it meets Grand River Drive. Mr. Sanford had some concern about this, but due to the long sight distance along the road, he was not overly worried. He indicated the grade is less than the maximum permitted. Mr. Decker indicated an alternative 'two-track' on the property was too far away to serve as an access road. Mr. Simmonds will ask the Township Engineer to examine the driveway and report back to the Planning Commission.

Comment 5 addressed the railroad track crossing the access drive. Both Mr. Sanford and Ms. Blumm expressed concern about this crossing, and the need to keep the brush cut down for visibility at the crossing. Train traffic appears to be light, and there are stop signs at the crossing for cars and buses. Mr. Decker agreed to get a letter of approval from the railroad company for the Planning Commission, including maintenance requirements for the crossing.

Comment 6 expressed concern about the number of 'port-a-johns' required at special events. It was determined this should be addressed during the Special Event permitting process. It was determined 'a couple' of port-a-johns would be sufficient to handle the 20-30 children expected at any one time during normal activities.

Comment 7 requested more information from Applicant on hours of operation, number of people in attendance at any one time and related operational plans. Ms. Blumm suggested limiting operations to daylight activities in the initial special land use, with annual review required to address changing circumstances.

Comment 8 on manure management was addressed by Mr. Clements, who suggested limiting the number of horses to 25. It is believed that the Department of Environmental Quality does not get

involved in manure management until the number of horses exceeds this count. Manure management would then be addressed as necessary during annual reviews of the Special Land Use.

Comment 9 on number of horses allowed was addressed by the proposal for Comment 8.

Comment 10 concerning occasional fund raising events on the property will be addressed by the Special Event permitting process.

Comment 11 required further information on parking. Mr. Decker indicated that total parking would allow forty to fifty vehicles, with truck-trailer parking in grassy areas. Mr. Batchelor suggested the parking near the river be moved further back from the river's edge to minimize runoff pollution.

Comment 12 outlined the need for a greenbelt in parking areas. It was determined that enough screening already existed naturally, and that canopy trees were not necessary.

Comment 13 requested information on outdoor lights. It was determined that Applicant just needed to comply with the township lighting ordinance, and that location of lights didn't have to be illustrated if activities were limited to daylight hours only.

After discussion, it was determined that all required information should be gathered before a decision is made by the Planning Commission on the Application. Tim Johnson emphasized the importance of documenting the requirements of the special land use for future enforcement. Since the summer season is now past, Mr. Decker agreed to gather the information required and to submit it to the Township, at which time he will request that the Application be decided at the next Regular Planning Commission meeting following submission.

Ms. Blumm then moved that the Lowell Charter Township Planning Commission defer its decision on the Application of Roanoke Ranch for Kids for a Special Land Use until they have provided the further information required of them, based on Tim Johnson's Memorandum of September 21, 2006 and the requests of the Planning Commission as just discussed, with consideration of the request to continue thereafter at the next Regular Planning Commission meeting. Mr. Batchelor seconded the motion. All in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

The meeting was opened to public comment at 8:37 p.m. No comments were offered. Public comment ended at 8:37 p.m.

#### **COMMISSIONER COMMENTS:**

Mr. Simmonds indicated that Fred Roodvoets may attend the next regular meeting to ask for a decision on his request to build a third non-farm home in a quarter-quarter section in the Ag-1 zoning district. He also noted that Flat River Outreach has a site plan for review.

Ms. Blumm indicated the new zoning maps were now available.

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Mr. Simmonds added that new printed zoning ordinance books would be available soon.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

Mr. Batchelor moved to adjourn. Seconded by Mr. Sanford. All in favor and the special meeting of the Lowell Charter Township Planning Commission was adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Submitted \_\_\_\_\_ Secretary  
Timothy Clements

Approved \_\_\_\_\_