

**MINUTES OF RAVENNA CITY PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**May 13, 2019**

The Meeting of the Ravenna City Planning Committee was called to order by Chairperson Rob Kairis at 6:22 P.M. Present were: Amy Michael, Andrew Kluge, Bruce Ribelin, Paul Moskun, and Matt Harper. Also attending the meeting were Mayor Frank Seman; Finance Director, Kimble Cecora; City Engineer, Bob Finney; Police Chief Jeff Wallis; Larry Silenius of 123 North Walnut Street, Ravenna, Ohio; Tim Calfee of 910 Murray Avenue, Ravenna, Ohio; Greg Francis of 558 Coolman Avenue, Ravenna, Ohio and Deena Tannert of 784 East Main Street, Ravenna, Ohio.

Mr. Kairis said the first item on the agenda is a discussion regarding group homes.

Mayor Seman said he thinks they need to look at the zoning code. As time goes on, people find different ways to handle problems. The zoning code is designed to make conditions as they were many, many years ago. This is one of the things where there is a concern. For instance, the zoning code allows for foster care in any one of the districts. No district is excluded. Foster care, many years ago, was a case where children, for one reason or another, are displaced and another family in the community takes them in and the displaced child lives with that family. What they are starting to see is that dwellings are being designed to house large numbers of anywhere from 10 to 15 with a person in the building to supervise. That does not work as well within the zoning code. They feel there should be some sort of oversight on this where at least a public hearing needs to be held so the neighbors have a chance to voice their opinion on it. They are looking at working with the rentals, cleaning up neighborhoods. If these types of operations are allowed to go just anywhere and open up without asking anybody, it's going to defeat the purpose of the zoning code.

Mr. Ribelin asked if Mayor Seman has any idea how many of these group home type situations there might be in this community.

Mayor Seman responded in the negative noting that is something they need to do. Mr. Finney has told him that they find these out when the inspections are done.

Mr. Finney said there are two levels of family foster care. There is the underage and then adults with disabilities. There are several adult facilities/homes in town that blend in. Unless you are a neighbor, you don't often understand what is going on. A vehicle picks them up, takes them to work, brings them home at the end of the day. There might be an adult stay there toward the evening but they don't necessarily spend the night. He assumes those adults are able to live on their own. With the children, it adds a different element. He thinks they can change the definition of family foster home. When he hears the word foster home, he thinks of a foster child staying with a family as defined by the current code. However, what they are hearing this is really a business. These folks are being paid and that adult isn't necessarily the only adult that will stay there. They might have shifts, from the way it was explained. It's turned into a business rather than truly taking somebody in. As they discussed, at least to start, redefining family foster

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home, removing the word, an “individual” and adding the word “family” then taking away the element of the business aspect. It’s his understanding many families who do foster children do receive a stipend from the government to do so. That’s not what they are questioning. The question is how many; the turnover of adults during any given day of the week.

Ms. Michael noted there is not adult actually living there. They go in and out during shifts. She understands they would spend the night but it’s not their house, home. They would be an employee.

Mr. Finney said the section he distributed discusses home based business and the different criteria. Folks who want to run a business out of their home who live in a residential neighborhood can come to the Planning Commission to get permission, as long as they meet the criteria in 127.04. There was also discussion at one point, what the State of Ohio requires for foster homes. He put the two links in to review. He found it interesting how many children can be in a bedroom, their ages, etc. The most recent request on North Freedom Street was because there is a five bedroom home. They could potentially get ten children into that house or maybe eight because the adult would need a bedroom. There were three stories. That has been taken off the table, from what they are told. This is a tough situation. They certainly don’t want to eliminate family foster homes, as he believes, a foster child going into a home could be very beneficial.

Ms. Michael said she thinks they need to get moving on this. These kinds of places are looking more and more in this area.

Mayor Seman said there is money available for this. He met with a county employee who is looking for a place. They want to bring foster kids back who are placed in other states. She told him the money for the upkeep of the house is no problem, paying rent, etc. She also does not want to put them into a neighborhood where they are going to be resented. There were three places they looked at and backed off of two of them just for that reason.

Mr. Ribelin said he thinks if they put ten or 12 kids altogether in a home, he’s not sure it is advantageous to the child.

Ms. Michael said it’s really like an orphanage. She understands the cost savings that is bringing these back, is huge. The money being spent out of county to host the kids is phenomenal. They are local kids. It’s a very sad situation.

Mayor Seman said along with this, they are trying to get a count on how many of these homes are out there. Most of them, everything is fine. There haven’t been any problems with those with mentally challenged folks. They’ve been well accepted in the neighborhoods. There is one for female veterans and the veteran house on Riddle. Now there some of these are popping up that are rehab homes. A lot of the kids they want to bring back are kids who have been abused or neglected. They do want to try to re-involve the parents but not at the house. They don’t even want the parents to know where the houses are. The potential for things that might upset neighbors are much higher. It’s not that they don’t care about these kids. They want to do their

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share. The City of Ravenna has done its share when they count the number of these homes, at one time, he was handed a number of 24 in the City. That was probably 20 years ago and he's pretty certain quite a few of cropped up since. They don't want to interfere with trying to help people. If they are serious about upgrading the neighborhoods, they have to at least account for this and have a methodical way of placing them. As the person he talked to said, it doesn't do them any good if the kids are resented in the neighborhood. The other thing he was told is that they can go anywhere in Portage County. They don't have to be in Ravenna. Her problem is finding a house big enough to accommodate the number of kids and have some kind of a yard so they can play and get exercise. He will keep working with her. But, they do need to change the definitions to make it work for the groups who want these homes. He doesn't think just arbitrarily placing them wherever they want is the answer. Times are different and the zoning code is getting a little archaic. There are other issues besides group homes they need to address.

Mr. Kairis asked if the proposed change is just for juveniles living in a foster home?

Mr. Finney said the intent is to keep it as simple as possible and currently an individual is able to do these things. He wants to remove the word "individual" and replace it with "family", trying to take the business end of it out. He does think they now need to define the commercial end; the individual end of it. If that's the case, he doesn't know if there is an official title of business of fostering. They can add that to the conditionally permitted uses. This is just a starting point.

Mr. Kairis noted that the proposal does not deal with the adult homes.

Mr. Finney responded in the affirmative. If you read under 43, Family Care Home, it discusses aged, mentally challenged people. That's from the aged end of it defined.

Mr. Kairis asked if this will help eliminate the problem when juveniles are being managed by this company.

Mr. Finney responded that it will be a permitted use. He wants to find a place in the code where they can conditionally permit them to be. If they define it as family vs. an individual, they can leave it in the permitted use but they need to redefine the individual management of these homes.

Mr. Kairis said he does question how many people are already in violation of these.

Mr. Finney said he is not aware of any issues with children in this context. He often gets calls from residents regarding the adults. It's almost always a parking issue. One person complained because they were smoking on the side porch. There's nothing he can do about that. But it always comes back to parking. Some homes will have four or five cars there at one time for different types of care.

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Mr. Kluge asked, specifically the house on Freedom, was that an individual purchasing the home and trying to lease it out to a governmental agency?

Mayor Seman said that real estate agents were looking at buying it because the lease is very lucrative. He isn't asking to take this directly in tonight and he thinks they need to do a little more research as to how other communities are dealing with this. Some of the nicer homes in the area are the ones that fit because they are bigger homes. What happens is people move and then their house doesn't sell. The owners are calling these non-profits and offering to lease their house.

Ms. Michael asked if that wouldn't be considered a multi-family dwelling. They can't take a home that was a single family dwelling and change it into a multi-family any longer. Wouldn't that be effective?

Mr. Finney said that it comes back to the definition. It doesn't define how many people can be in a home. A definition of family defines what family is and family foster home, it is understood the children might not be related.

Mr. Kairis said that he agrees they need to look at this more deeply and believes this simple change is something they can do now. He believes it would take three readings and a public hearing.

The clerk concurred noting they are looking at a three month process.

Mr. Finney said the last thing they want to sound is insensitive.

Ms. Michael concurred and noting there are people who have owned their homes for years and they are afraid of what could happen. They don't know enough about it. She would be concerned if it was next door to her.

Mr. Kairis said that it has been a concern for residents and, at very least, they will know the residents will know they are looking at it. Trying to be sensitive about it and also try to be practical about it.

Mr. Finney noted that he provided links and thought it was eye opening and he would like for everyone to take a look at it.

There being no further discussion, it was decided by those present the issue will be forwarded to the Committee of the Whole for further action.

Mr. Finney said the property maintenance employees continue to find violations. He said a couple of years ago to get the curb appeal first and when they get to a certain point, they can start looking down driveways and looking at back yards. They are currently looking at the back yards. The easiest thing now is to write violations. The hardest part is to enforce them. They'll send out a couple of violations. One will be certified and then they go to the law director. There were 14 high grass violations; seven were actually mowed over the weekend. There were six or seven going to have the mowers go out and take care of them. It's a continuous thing.

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Mr. Kluge said since there was conversation with Full Spectrum on the website, one of the things he asked would be if there could be a digital form for property complaints.

Mr. Finney said there is a complaint form on line but if the website isn't working then it may no longer be up and running. The one Mr. Kluge sent from Youngstown is very advanced.

There being no further business to discuss, this meeting was adjourned at 6:18 PM.

**ATTEST:**

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Clerk of Council

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Robert Kairis, Chairman  
Planning Committee