

VILLAGE OF SMITHTON
COMMITTEE AS A WHOLE
October 9, 2018
7:00PM

The meeting was called to order at 7:00pm with everyone reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. Mayor Klein, Trustees, Yoch, Smallwood, Becherer, Rogers and Elbe were present; Trustee Becker arrived after the start of the meeting.

Mayor Klein explained the meeting was called to review and discuss the two special use requests – 13 S. Main Street f/k/a Smithton Lumber Company, and the self-storage located at 4753 State Route 159. Klein asked all guests wishing to speak to sign in. Klein noted only one request will be discussed at a time. This meeting is not to be a debate between the board members and the audience nor between audience members. There will be no decision made this evening, but at the full board meeting on Tuesday, October 16, 2018. All those wishing to speak were sworn in.

13 S. MAIN STREET – Neal Trentman explained that he and Mike Middendorf would like to convert the buildings on the property to self-storage units – some enclosed, some open, it will be available for boats, small campers and trailers. There will be nothing chemical or hazardous stored in the facility. They would like the former store to remain as a store if they can find a tenant to rent or use for climate-controlled storage. They will install new fencing and gates along the back, security lighting and cameras. There will also be signs posted along the Julia Street side of building stating no parking for the tenants. Trustee Yoch asked if this will be self-park or if the owners would park the vehicles. Trentman plans on self-park but if they see a need for it, they will purchase a fork-lift to move the vehicles for the tenants.

Dallas Dlouhy – asked what the zoning board’s reasoning was for initially rejecting this special use request. Attorney Durso explained the board looked at the facts that enumerate in the statute and did not feel it fits in the character of the surrounding area. There was concern with the school being across from the structure. Durso explained that the board also denied two variance requests – a fence along the front of the property and a request that the surface of the parking areas be rock instead of the required concrete or asphalt. The zoning board has final say on all variance requests; with a special use request, the zoning board makes a recommendation to the full board who will then have the final vote. Dlouhy later commented

that this proposed business is the first thing that has come along. Would we be better to wait for another business opportunity.

Chad Jennings – with regard to the asphalt vs. the rock surface, what is the issue. Durso explained that the owners requested to keep the rock as it is now. The ordinance states any area where vehicles will be parked must be concrete or asphalt. Their request was denied. Jennings asked what economic benefit the Village will gain from the property, which Durso stated real estate taxes. If there is retail involved, there would be sales tax. Jennings feels, with all the other vacant buildings the village fears there will be another. If nothing else comes along, he suggests tearing down the building and having some green-space for the community.

Julie Crosby – stated she is disappointed that we would allow something in the middle of town that would be esthetically unappealing and hopes it is denied.

David Brennan – asked about the structure of the existing buildings and if there are any requirements of them. Middendorf explained if there are any concerns from the village, he will have a structural engineer look at the buildings. Brennan asked if the village considered purchasing the property and possibly putting in public parking along with green space. Klein reminded him that Smithton is a bedroom community and its only income is real estate taxes.

Linda Schramm – is supportive of new businesses. As a member of the Complete Streets Committee, they have worked for the past four years to build a walking/biking path to help beautify the town. This property has been in poor condition for a long time and would prefer to see something besides a storage facility on Main Street.

Brian Lester – there have been many comments regarding storage sheds being a poor appearance. When you drive from north to south through town, there are multiple vacant business spots where every structure should be a concern. If you had an outside business owner drive through town and see all the vacant business, they are not going to feel this would be a successful business location. He would like to see residents from town and out of town to invest in this community. Smithton has the highest median home value of all of St. Clair County; household incomes in Smithton are among the top in the County – this is comparing to O'Fallon, Swansea, etc. You would think this would be a thriving business community, but it is not. Here you have business owners who are professional builders, residents of Smithton and have invested in this town by wanting to improve this property. Lester encourages the board to support pro-business and he applauds these business owners for being proactive and reaching out to community members and to modify their plans to address the community's concerns.

Trentman shared copies of renderings he has with their proposed plans. They do plan to put new metal and garage doors on all the sheds and update the business building. Durso asked if

vehicles being stored will be visible from the street, which Trentman explained there could be a few.

Mikaela Mueller – is concerned about the safety of the kids from St. John’s using the street for track practice and additional traffic from the business. She would like to see a more community-friendly business put in. Trentman explained they went to the storage facility south of town and watched between 7:30-8:30am and there was no traffic coming in or out; again between 2:30-3:30pm and there were only two vehicles – these times being before and after school hours. Trentman also cited two studies he researched from much larger storage facilities at Brigham Young University and another in Florida and their traffic flow was minimal. Trentman doesn’t feel this type of business will generate a lot of traffic.

Jolene Pierpoint – stated it is not all about the traffic. St. John’s school is 86-feet from the entrance of the business. She doesn’t feel, even with the security cameras, that they will be able to monitor everybody coming in and out and seeing what is being stored in the sheds. There may be a need for storage facilities, but this is not the right location. Chad Jennings commented that the studies Trentman referred to are both located in industrial areas, they were both gated, monitored and had employees present.

Darrell Beals – commented that the new businesses coming into town are businesses that we already have. Durso explained we cannot stop a business from developing if they own the property. Mayor Klein stated he cannot deny a license without due cause. The grocers he contacted are looking at our traffic count that comes from IDOT and say it is not enough.

Jake Hottenrott – noted numerous businesses that have come to town over the years. He noted the vacant businesses but feels Smithton is a growing business community. He has seen a lot of change in his 20 years living here. He stated the real estate taxes for the lumber yard are currently \$6,340.00 – this is about what he pays for his home; the daycare at the north end of town pays \$15,000.00 in real estate taxes for a smaller parcel. He believes a large storage facility may increase that number but not by a lot. He feels we should be looking for a development opportunity that would increase contributions to this town and create an opportunity for Smithton residents to work and shop. Middendorf responded stating his construction company built Dollar General and Mueth’s Tavern. When doing so they keep in mind the curb-side appeal and that is also their intention with this new business. With the improvements planned for their property, real estate taxes will increase and there is potential sales tax from another business renting their retail space.

Brian Lester – commented that a retail business would bring in more traffic than the storage facility. Trustee Yoch noted there has always been traffic flow coming from the lumber yard.

Kelly Wright – agrees the lumber yard has been around for a while and there is no way of knowing what the traffic flow will be for a storage facility. She stated that with St. John’s there is always something going on – school, summer camp, athletic events – and she is concerned with the security of people coming in and out along with what is unknowingly being stored.

Courtney Wilson – talked about the longer term look of the village. She feels just because the building is empty, it’s not a bad thing. Looking at Red Bud who has a lower tax rate, they had several empty businesses but now their town is looking good. Although they have a 4-way stop, the lumber yard area being the middle of town is an opportunity to create a downtown area. Smithton is a great community, but it is lacking the look. Durso followed-up by stating if the board does grant this special use permit, they can place any conditions or restrictions to this permit.

Curtis McKay – agrees that it is a gamble to have a vacant lot. He doesn’t feel the middle of town should house industrial businesses. He would rather see a green space in the center of town.

Attorney Durso asked the property owners if they have drafted covenants or regulations that would be given to the tenants. Trentman responded that they have not yet done so.

Unnamed resident acknowledged all the previous comments and concerns but is concerned about conditions and limitations of the business. He presented a petition of 100 signatures for consideration from the St. John the Baptist school board, community members and parents of students of St. John’s. He believes the Mayor and trustees have a duty to everybody in the community along with the kids at St. John’s school, and if they feel allowing this industrial facility is the best thing to do they are wrong.

Mike Middendorf commented that over the years, nobody was aware of all the flammable and explosive materials stored at the lumber yard at all times, nor did anybody comment on the traffic created from the lumber yard. He doesn’t understand why now this is an issue.

Trustee Elbe commented that over the years with the lumber yard, there were tractor-trailers pulling in and out all day long.

A resident asked if they could restrict entering and exiting to Route 159 and not use Julia Street. Trentman stated that would not be feasible nor wasn’t sure if the fire department would approve that. He also stated their intention is for this to be a residential storage facility and they would not have an issue if the village included that in their stipulations.

Christina Hill – commented that because the lumber yard did something all these years doesn’t make it right. We can now decide we need to make it better. We have heard a lot of comments

this evening that we do not want this in the community. We should look at our strategy and look at what came out of the East-West Gateway council for the beautification of our Main Street. They have just built a beautiful home that they are proud of, but they are not necessarily proud of the town and what it has to offer to the community. Durso explained that there is due process and if a business meets the criteria, we have to grant them a license. Mayor Klein added that as liquor commissioner, he has to follow the state statute and has to have a valid reason to deny somebody a license.

Mike Melvin – asked, when a business moves into town, do they present the village with a solid business plan. Mayor Klein explained there are a list of acceptable businesses listed in the code book which is where this special use request came from. Durso also explained the difference between Home Rule vs. non-Home Rule noting that Smithton is non-Home Rule which means we must abide by the state statutes.

Father Stan from St. John the Baptist Church stated the church is in no position to oppose or endorse a business. They do not stand in opposition of the business, but the church has expressed safety concerns for the students and they have had meetings with the proposed business owners regarding these. One of their main concerns in today's society, is somebody storing guns and ammunition in the facility and would like to see that stated in the restrictions. He also stated if this is opposed, there is concern of yet another vacant business in town.

Ashley Petterson – would like to see more businesses like Walton's Ice Cream where you see families and the community gathering. Storage units would be okay but in a different area. There is a reason why they have to ask for a special use request because their business is not part of the B-1 allowable businesses.

It was suggested by another resident that background checks be done on anybody renting a storage unit.

Joe Kulesa – asked if the old house on the property will be torn down and the parking lot paved. Middendorf confirmed that it is. Kulesa would like to see the business meet the character of what you would expect to see.

Jim Mourey – commented that we can place any restriction we want, but people renting units are not going to go to the business owners and tell them what they are storing so Mourey feels the request should not be granted.

Dave Pierpoint – commented that tractor-trailer drivers are experienced with driving these large vehicles. There is not a guarantee that somebody pulling a large RV has the experience needed to pull their RV in and out. Pierpoint cuts grass at St. John's and sees kids from all over

town walk down Julia Street to go down to Walton's so there is more than just the kids from St. John's that we need to worry about.

Brian Belt – is part owner of a storage facility in Waterloo. They see very little traffic on a daily basis. He stated that the current condition of the lumber yard property is unacceptable; he has looked at the renderings and has no problem with the improvements whether it is in town or at the end of town. He feels it would be hard to deny business owners who are part of this community who want to build a business in this community.

Andrew Pfeiffer – commented there are numerous people in town who have RV's and boats parked in their driveways which is not esthetically pleasing. So having a facility here in town might remove some of these vehicles from parking in subdivisions.

Linda Schramm – shared her gratitude for the Mayor and board members for their time and the number of countless hours they put in.

Neal Trentman – noted the petition that was brought in this evening and asked for a show of hands for those who support the business. Trentman also thanked the board for their consideration. His family has lived here since 2001, they are active in the community and are members of St. John the Baptist Church. They want to run a good, respectable business for this community.

Mayor Klein noted again that this request will be voted on at the October 16 board meeting. There will not be any further discussions at that meeting. Klein commented also on what the board does for the community. Durso stated there may be discussions among the board members but there will be no more public comment. Votes are not at a Committee as a Whole meeting but at an open Board meeting. A resident asked if, as public servants, board members can be contacted which Klein stated they may. He also directed them to the Smithton website and noted the board members have email addresses they can send comments to.

4753 STATE ROUTE 159 – This is a special use request for a self-storage facility. All members wishing to speak were sworn in.

Mayor Klein explained this meeting is to review and discuss a special use request for a RV and trailer self-storage facility. All those wishing to speak were sworn in.

Patty Moeckel – has owned and operated Smithton Storage Center for over 20 years. She has maintained her property and has never had an ordinance violation. She plans to continue to maintain the esthetics of her property. She would like to gravel an area south of the current storage building and park 15-18 small unmotorized campers in that area. There is another area that is currently paved that she would like to park motorhomes and boats. She will put in a

treeline on the east and west sides of the area; there will be dusk-to-dawn lights in the area and currently has security cameras at the storage facility and will add more for this addition. She would like to put in an electronic gate but at this time cannot since Bruce Anderson, adjoining property, holds a non-transferable easement to his property. Other than a few broken locks, she has never had any problems. There is a demand for RV and camper storage – she currently has a waiting list. She also owns the business center so is on premise Tuesday through Saturday and sees very little traffic coming in and out. Economically, improvements will raise property taxes and, in addition, the village receives replacement tax from corporate businesses. She also supports the community with donations for fundraisers, donates her time and offers free storage for organizations. Durso asked if she plans on constructing buildings for indoor storage for these vehicles, which Moeckel responded not at this time. Durso asked if she will be putting up any fencing, which she responded no. Durso, referring to the rock parking area, explained to Moeckel that our ordinance states any area used for parking must be concrete or asphalt. She understood that to be for motorized vehicles only.

Heather Jennings – recalls a couple of years ago there was somebody who wanted to put in a storage facility on Route 159 outside of the village limits. The county had denied their request because of esthetics and safety reasons. The property owners then tried to have their property annexed in to the village which apparently never happened. If the county doesn't want these open storage areas, why would the Village of Smithton want them. Mayor Klein acknowledged this property and stated the property owner never attempted to annex.

Joe Kulesa – stated he lives across the highway from this property. He feels they are great neighbors and has never had any problems with vehicles coming in and out. He supports her request and would like to see her business grow.

Kim Quirin – live in Ledgestone. Her backyard faces this area and noted there are already three campers parked there. She does have an RV and stores it on property located out in the country. She pays a homeowner's association fee which does not allow her to park her camper. She doesn't want to look out her backyard and have to look at these campers and also has safety concerns.

Brian Lester – encourages the board to encourage future business owners to invest in Smithton and encourage existing business owners to grow and expand.

Mary Ruetters – has lived in Smithton her whole life. She appreciates the businesses in town and supports them, but she does not want to look out her front door and look at campers parked there. She doesn't feel it will be a secure area with not having hours of operation. There are currently campers parked there without permits one of which is not licensed. She doesn't want to see it turn into another derelict area – noting Elite Tractor – and the village is expending a lot of resources to try to get it cleaned up. She agrees the current storage facility is

well maintained, but the trees currently there will die and will need to be replanted and those will take years to grow. She also has concerns of chemicals running off the property and into her pond. Without having a fence or being a locked facility, there is a safety concern. She feels, although the village may receive some tax benefits, property taxes for the homes around the storage facility will decrease in value. The school owns property across the highway from the storage facility – there is a safety concern for the kids. She finished by commenting the board probably would not want this property next to their homes and neither does she.

Mike and Christy Harris – live next to the storage facility. They feel if somebody has an issue they should put a fence around their property. Moeckel keeps her property nice and doesn't have a problem with her request.

Darrell Beals – was initially hesitant about this proposal but talked with Moeckel who showed him the layout. He feels with the treeline added between the highway and storage area, the vehicles would not be visible. Beals suggested to the board they should specify the type and size of trees to be planted and that they should be replaced as needed.

Patty Moeckel shared that there is no water, electric or any other utilities available at the storage facility. The lease states you cannot live there, work on vehicles or loiter. If there are complaints about somebody storing a vehicle, she can have them removed. Illinois Self-Storage Lien Laws state she can remove a vehicle without title after 60 days. If there are derelict vehicles on her property, she doesn't want to see them either and will have them removed.

Mayor Klein asked for a show of hands of who was for and against this request. He again directed residents to the Smithton website and noted the board members have email addresses they can send comments to. As stated earlier, there may be discussions among the board members but there will be no more public comments.

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting. All board members were in favor.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:55pm.