

Richard Sanderson Remarks
Ladies and Gentlemen of the Planning Commission.

Since you appointed me chairman of the Ad-hoc Committee to study the setbacks on the US 31 Corridor, I have tried to keep my personal opinions to myself so that the Committee was not influenced by the opinions of the chair. This statement is mine and not necessarily the opinions of the Committee.

The Committee made a detailed study of each property in the Corridor to determine the Right of Way, current building location, current required setback, current use, current legal nonconforming use and effect of new setback requirements on the current use. This data is shown in chart form and as overlays on an aerial photo of the area in the Appendix of the Report. The current rights of way range from 33 feet to 110 feet as a result of purchases made by MDOT in the 20's and the 50's. The current front yard setback requirement is 50 feet from the right of way for the entire Township. The legal purpose for a front yard setback is to provide for public safety, police and fire access and aesthetics.

The Committee studied all this data and made an effort to arrive at a proposal for increased setbacks along US31 south of the Village with minimal impact on the current conformity of the properties. Everyone on the Committee wants to maintain the current "rural look" of the Corridor. The Report represents the fruits of that effort.

Except for agricultural property there are only three pieces of property that would be affected by the proposal. Two are Chris Whites residence on the north side of the Hacienda and Walt Meyers house (zoned commercial) on the south side. The Hacienda is only 66 feet from the road centerline and has been granted a variance so it could be rebuilt on the same footprint. If other structures were built on either side of the Hacienda at 83 feet from the centerline it would not affect the "rural look" of the Township because of the setback. The other undeveloped property is owned by Ed Hammer immediately south of his existing building. He agreed to place his current buildings more than 150 feet from the centerline and any new building would look best lined up with the current buildings. In summary any change in the setback requirement would not significantly produce a meaningful change in the future appearance of the non-agricultural properties in the Township.

Everyone agreed that the current agricultural uses on this Corridor is highly desirable and should be strengthened and preserved. The current group of farmers are dedicated to farming and want to continue to farm their land. One of our Committee members represents the fourth generation of farming families and the current generation of farmers is primarily in their active years. In short no setback change is required to maintain the appearance of the current farm properties. The only reason to change the setback requirements for these agricultural uses is to control the appearance of any non-agricultural uses in the future. There is little likelihood that any of these farms would be sold for development in the near future.

Currently Chumbs' Corners and Acme along 31 represent what we don't want. They certainly do not have a "rural look" about them. But why?? Many of the businesses are setback from the highway. Would they be ok?? Do the strip malls look good? What about the gas stations? Motels? McDonalds? Closer to home are Thirlby's and PadLock our future look? How should we have these types of development look in Elk Rapids? What changes should be made to them to create a "rural look"? The Planning Commission should take a long hard look at these issues before changing the setback requirements for something that might not happen for a long time.

The Master Plan prepared and approved by the Planning Commission suggests a number of other ideas to improve the future development of the Corridor. The Committee became very interested when some of these were brought up and some members wanted to specifically include them in the report. The Master Plan suggests ideas such as: landscaping, dimensional limits and other requirements for parking lots between a commercial building and the road; limiting access drive curb cuts and requiring service drives connecting various developments; preservation of natural areas; buffering requirements; re-evaluate private road zoning requirements; require certain construction standards for new buildings; place limits on the size of commercial developments; controls to minimize development effects on natural features and topography; and assess the feasibility of a bike path parallel and adjacent to Elk Lake Road.

In summary, we have documented the current status of the Corridor. This data will remain fairly static for some time into the future. My personal opinion is that to proceed immediately with new setback requirements would accomplish little in and of itself. It should be delayed and considered along with the other recommendations in the Master Plan.

The Committee would now be happy to take any questions you have regarding our report.