

Royalton Township Joint Public Hearing Minutes
6052 Royalton Road, Braham, MN 55006
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29 April 2025
Approved

6:00 p.m., 29 April 2025, Planning Commission Member Gary Valvoda called to order the duly posted and published joint hearing of the Royalton Township planning commission and board of supervisors. Planning Commission members present: Gary Valvoda and Doug Stanger, along with Zoning Administrator John Kemen; board members present: Chair Jeff Schlaeger, Supervisor John Graham, Supervisor Pete Belland and Clerk Duane Swanson. Robert Ruppe, town legal counsel, was also present. A deputy from the Pine County Sheriff's office was present to assure security at the meeting. Approximately 76 members of the public were in attendance.

Member Stanger moved, Supervisor Graham seconded, to open the public hearing. Zoning Administrator Kemen declared the purpose of the hearing: to consider the amendments to the township's zoning ordinance including, but not limited to, the establishment of a new zoning district, amending the zoning map, other zoning related issues including, but not limited to, proposed text changes to the zoning ordinance, zoning of cannabis businesses, adult uses, short term rentals, and campgrounds, as well as modifications to permitted, interim, and conditional uses.

Clerk Swanson noted that copies of the draft ordinances have been posted on the town's website, with full paper copies available at the town office, the Pine City Public Library, and the Alice Studt Library at the Braham Event Center. Zoning Administrator Kemen reviewed the procedures for the public testimony.

The following individuals gave testimony or comments: Joe Zappa (this was a rushed process; claimed an alleged conflict of interest by Zoning Administrator John Kemen; his team distributed a 10 page handout reproducing planning commission minutes and documents concerning conflict of interest), Alex Zappa (commented on the single parcel zoning district and urged a "no" vote), DJ Warden (noted the transparency of the erba team over a long period of time, referenced erba's letter regarding a hastily-prepared ordinance), Julia Zappa (noted the firm's excitement over starting a new business on Cabin Drive, referenced potential conflict of interest which is not covered by township insurance), Roxanne Orvis (decried lack of transparency, the work of an "ad hoc" committee, and the impact of attorney fees on the annual budget, recommended turning issue over to Pine County), Leslie Orvis (discussed his firing from the planning commission, cited the Office of Cannabis Management's reasonable restrictions, and threatened supervisors), Priscilla Schneider (recounted her reasons for leaving planning commission due to having been accused of taking bribes), Paul Wilkens (noted that individuals have lived near the tomato farm for years and spoke against restrictions on temporary rentals),

Cindy DeGidio (individuals have a right to sell their property to whomever they wish, zoning rules have not been updated in years), Roy DeGidio (it's too late to change, clearly discriminatory), Laura Martin (questioned where the proposed amendments were published, cited confusing definitions, and noted that cannabis is referred to in several ways), Marti Estey (expressed disappointment as a real estate agent for what the Martins have had to go through to sell their property), Tom Martin (challenged the board to stop catering to a handful of people, characterizing it as a "witch hunt"), Troy Downing (described the proposed new zoning district as a landlocked parcel accessible only through another county), Bryan Weis (thanked the board and planning commission for their efforts and urged a "yes" vote), Joe Reed (expressed support for the revisions noting that marijuana is not tomatoes), Marshall Pearson (thanked the board for listening, expressed concern over increased legal fees, noted that while he may disagree cannabis is legal with restrictions), Dale Heidelberger (declared it was "shameful" for the board to have let this issue go on for so long), Bobby DeGray (noted contradictions of definition within the proposed ordinance relating to indoor growing), Chris DeGray (noted slanderous attacks towards his business, ostensibly by supervisors), Michael Belland (had signed up to speak but declined), Lexi McCormick (on behalf of a younger generation, expressed her embarrassment at what she was seeing, supported property owners' right to sell), Colin Jones (noted his position as an agricultural researcher for erba, noted the great security already in rule and growing these plants has a lower level of fertilizer than many others so there is no negative environmental effect), Kathryn Tiede (noted her confusion about the ordinance and need for clarity), Gary Guptill (encouraged separating the cannabis issues from the other issues addressed in the ordinance). Clerk Swanson read a statement from Sarah Grunwald, the only written statement received at the town hall (noting the negative effect on greenhouses if this ordinance is approved).

During testimony, various outbursts from the audience occurred, including calls for the attendees to vote. Chair Schlaeger noted that this is a hearing to obtain testimony and that it is not an election. A second Pine County deputy also appeared at the hearing.

Member Stanger moved, Supervisor Belland seconded, to close the public comment portion of the meeting. The motion carried unanimously, with Members Valvoda and Stanger and Supervisors Schlaeger, Graham, and Belland voting "Aye."

Member Valvoda moved, Member Stanger seconded, to recommend to the board that the proposed zoning ordinance and the accompanying ordinance with map establishing a new zoning district be adopted. The motion carried unanimously with Members Valvoda and Stanger and Supervisor Belland voting "Aye."

At 7:00 p.m., the joint public hearing was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Duane P. Swanson, Clerk

ATTEST:

_____, Doug Stanger, Planning Commission Member
_____, Gary Valvoda, Planning Commission Member
_____, Jeff Schlaeger, Board of Supervisors, Chair
_____, John Graham, Board Supervisor
_____, Pete Belland, Supervisor
_____, John Kemen, Zoning Administrator