

The Thorntown Plan Commission met in a regular meeting on August 11, 2025, at 6:00 PM at the Thorntown Town Hall.

Members in attendance were as follows:

- President Don Gray – Citizen Member
- Erick Smith – Citizen Member.
- Vice President Gene Doctor – Citizen Member.
- Dalton Humphreys – Town Employee.
- Frank Clark – Town Employee.

Others in attendance: Marcellus Johnson, Planning Administrator.

President Gray calls the meeting to order at 6:02 PM.

## **OPENING CEREMONIES**

President Gray leads the Plan Commission in the Pledge of Allegiance.

## **DETERMINATION OF QUORUM**

President Gray declares a quorum.

## **ADOPTION OF MINUTES**

Motion by Mr. Smith, second by Mr. Humphreys, to adopt the minutes from the meeting on July 14, 2025

AYES: Erick Smith, Don Gray, Gene Doctor, Dalton Humphreys, Frank Clark. NAYS: Zero. ABSTAIN: Zero. Motion carries 5, 0, 0.

## **AGENDA CONSIDERATIONS**

There are none.

## **COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC ON ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA**

### **Question about Tiny Home**

Mr. Rick Bechtold of 210 N. Front St explains that his mother-in-law, Mrs. Kae Campbell, has found a tiny home that she would like to purchase and place on his property and asks if that is something that is allowed in Thorntown. He gives the Commissioners printed screenshots of the Facebook post advertising the tiny home.

President Gray says that the minimum dwelling size currently allowed in the code is 1200 s.f., and he says that the town is currently re-writing its zoning code and is taking tiny homes into consideration.

Mrs. Campbell says that the home she is interested in buying is 399 s.f.

President Gray asks her if it would be on wheels or built on site.

Mrs. Campbell answers that this model is on wheels and could have a skirt built around the base to cover and secure the wheels. She adds that if necessary she can find a different model that can be built on a foundation, but she really likes this one. She points out in particular that because it is used, it is very affordable. It has everything in it and a porch. She says it was her understanding that the Town didn't approve tiny homes before, but she was wondering if that had changed.

President Gray clarifies that there have been no requests to build a tiny home [in the time that he's been on the APC] but that someone did have a mini-barn that they wanted to convert into a dwelling unit.

Mrs. Campbell says that she looked up the State of Indiana's tiny home regulations, adding that she understands that municipalities can have different requirements, and the state defines the maximum size of a tiny home to be 599 s.f.

President Gray points out that the advertisement brought in as an exhibit describes the home as an "RV" and says that the code prohibits a person from living 12 months of the year in an RV. He asks Mrs. Campbell if she will be living in the tiny home year-round.

Mrs. Campbell says that yes, she will be, and she clarifies that it is not an RV.

President Gray asks how soon they'd like to purchase the home and move it onto the property.

Mrs. Campbell says as soon as possible once it's been approved. That's the only obstacle.

Mr. Smith mentions again that the ordinances are being re-written and that the full draft was expected at the end of the year. President Gray asks what the new ordinance will say about tiny homes and ADUs.

Mr. Johnson explains that Debbie Luzier hasn't drafted that chapter of the ordinance yet, so he's not sure what standards she'll write in and how it will be handled in the ordinance. He says that he will talk to her to find out what she's thinking.

Mr. Smith points out that even so, the Town Council will still have to adopt any new ordinances. Mr. Johnson agrees and explains the timeline: the first full draft is due in December 2025, then that draft will go before the Plan Commission in a public hearing and then the Town Council, so the earliest—if everything goes well—that the new ordinance can be adopted is the end of January 2026.

President Gray suggests that January 2026 is less than 6 months away, so if they were to treat it like an RV, they could have the tiny home on the property and she could live in it for the time being as an RV under current ordinances.

Mr. Smith asks Mr. Johnson if attaching the tiny home to the primary structure would get around the problem.

Mr. Johnson suggests that it could possibly solve the problem, but that would depend on how Thorntown defines a "dwelling unit" as 2-dwelling unit structures are still required to have 1200 s.f. per dwelling unit. Mr. Smith asks if it would be possible to consider the additional dwelling unit as just an addition onto the house that happens to have an additional bathroom and a second kitchen. Mr. Johnson reiterates that it's possible that Plan Commission, Staff, or the Building Inspector could

take up that interpretation, it just depends on what the code says about when something is considered a dwelling unit.

Mr. Smith asks how they will handle utility hookups for the tiny home.

Mr. Bechtold says that they weren't sure what the requirements would be, but his preference would be for the tiny home to have a separate hookup from the primary residence.

Mr. Smith asks Mr. Johnson if this would count as an accessory structure.

Mr. Johnson explains that since residential is a primary use in Thorntown's current ordinance [and the ordinance does not contain any provisions for accessory uses] the tiny home would be considered a second primary structure, which is prohibited by the zoning ordinance. The ordinance is written such that each lot can only contain 1 residential structure, even if that structure contains multiple dwellings. However, if the tiny home were attached to the primary structure in some way, such as by breezeway, then it could be considered a single structure.

President Gray mentions that there was another individual who took that route and attached a small structure to his primary structure with a breezeway.

VP Doctor adds that he's seen a tiny home like the one exhibited just outside of town on 700 [Pearl Street] located at the end of a driveway. Mrs. Campbell says that's what she would like to do with hers.

Mr. Bechtold says that Mrs. Campbell used to live in Florida, but she lost her home to hurricane damage 2 years ago. Mrs. Campbell adds that there were 4 hurricanes and she can't live through that again. At the same time, her income is limited and she can't afford to buy or rent any of the places available in or near Thorntown. She cites, for example, a 2 bedroom unit on offer for over \$1800 a month.

Mr. Johnson says that the Town has no process for granting a variance either, adding that this would be a good instance where such a process would be very useful. At this time though, he says, their best bet would be to wait until the new code is passed in 6+ months.

Mr. Smith advises them to go to a Town Council meeting to speak to the council about their story so that the council can see that there is a need for this kind of housing in Thorntown.

President Gray pulls up the property map on his computer and asks if the plan was to put the tiny home on the part of the parcel that extends behind the neighboring property towards the water tower.

Mr. Bechtold says that they recently donated a portion of that part of the property to the Town so the water utility could build a driveway.

Mr. Smith says that he would mention that when they go speak to Town Council because it shows some goodwill towards the Town. He reiterates that they should make sure to attend a Town Council meeting where they will have an opportunity to make public comment just like they've done at the APC meeting tonight. He tells Mr. Bechtold and Mrs. Campbell that they meet in the same room next week (August 18). They may have to fill out a comment card, but they should be allowed to speak. He says if he were in their position he would introduce himself, say "you may know me because we

donated some property to the Town recently,” and go on to explain that Mrs. Campbell has been displaced by the hurricanes and would like to live in Thorntown but she’s looked and can’t afford anything but that this would be an affordable option and the only thing stopping them is that it’s not allowed by the code. Please consider updating the code to allow this kind of development.

Mr. Humphries adds that it is Monday at 7pm.

Mr. Smith says that if they know anyone else or can gather anyone else who is also looking for similar options, they should try to organize those people to come and speak to council.

Mrs. Campbell leaves her contact information with Mr. Johnson so he can get back to her after doing some more research. Then she and Mr. Bechtold leave.

### **Additional Discussion**

Mr. Humphreys asks if it would be possible to fast-track a particular code section in the rewrite. President Gray says that he wondered about that too.

Mr. Johnson says that it’s possible, particularly if Town Council does want to go that route.

President Gray mentions that part of the concern with tiny homes is making sure that people don’t use them as [short-term] rental properties or create tiny home parks similar to mobile home parks. He connects that to a meeting he and Mr. Johnson had months ago with a developer who did mobile home and tiny home developments. President Gray also brings up a text he received from another Thorntown resident who sent a link to an article about Fishers’ recent efforts to codify a prohibition on institutional investors and large-scale rental development.

The Commissioners discuss some of the challenges with managing these concerns such as: how many properties are too many; what if the owners maintain the rental properties well; and how to ensure that bad actors don’t use loopholes or straw buyers to get around any prohibitions.

The Commissioners briefly comment on news that Arbor Homes has sold 40-50 homes already in Westfall Place.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

There are none.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### **UDO Re-write Progress**

Mr. Smith asks if the code re-write is still proceeding according to schedule, and Mr. Johnson confirms that it is.

### **Annexation of Property at 8128 W SR 47**

Mr. Smith asks about how annexation occurs.

Mr. Johnson explains the process: property owners produce and sign a petition for annexation and present it to Town Council for their consideration. Town Council will do their due diligence in

assessing that annexation is feasible and then will vote to approve the annexation after a public hearing.

President Gray adds that it needs to be adjacent to Town boundaries.

Mr. Johnson expands on this, saying that the requirement is that 1/8 of the total perimeter of the property to be annexed needs to be contiguous with the existing boundary of the Town.

President Gray says that some of the property owners south of SR 47 surrounded by Westfall Place are also considering annexation.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

There are none.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Mr. Humphreys announces that the alley vacation ordinance was passed. Mr. Johnson says that the Clerk-Treasurer just needs to take the signed ordinance to be recorded by the county.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

VP Doctor makes a motion to adjourn. Mr. Smith seconds. Meeting adjourned at 6:48 PM.

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Donald Gray

President

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Marcellus Johnson

Secretary