

Township introduces new interactive zoning tool

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Shelby Township has introduced a new interactive online zoning tool that streamlines the process of navigating the township's zoning ordinance.

Photo provided by Brad Bates

SHELBY TOWNSHIP — For Shelby Township residents who have wanted to add a shed in their backyard or build an add-on for their home, traversing the zoning code book to make sure they are doing things by the rules could be intimidating.

Now the township has made it a little easier with a new online tool that provides an interactive zoning map, clickable links within the 300-page zoning code document and an all-around clearer format.

The Shelby Township Board of Trustees approved a \$31,600 contract with Giffels Webster at a 2017 board meeting to transition to the company's Clearzoning product and adopted the format in February. The Clearzoning format for Shelby Township launched March 8 on the township's website.

With the tool, residents, contractors and developers can see what any area within the township is zoned, and then click on that section to bring up the zoning code document to get more information. The website will jump to the exact page needed in the document.

Township Planning Director Glenn Wynn said he has been familiar with Clearzoning for a few years and has had the township set aside money to purchase the tool. Not being the first to jump at integrating the tool was important, Wynn said, as now the township knows how useful the product can be for everyone.

"The biggest improvement is instead of going through a 300-page document, you can go directly to what you need," Wynn said. "It is meant for people who may not use it on a regular basis to feel comfortable with it. There are a lot more graphics in there that explain concepts and requirements, and it is interactive."

The Board of Trustees' vote to adopt the format in February followed a unanimous recommendation from the Planning Commission in January. The Clearzoning tool has been used in municipalities in Colorado, Louisiana, Ohio and West Virginia.

Wynn said Shelby Township is the first to bring in the planning tool in Macomb County, while it has previously been used in other communities in Oakland County.

“If a resident wants to put an accessory building in their backyard and they don’t understand the requirements, this is real easy for them to use and get the answers to some of those questions before coming to our counter,” Wynn said. “This is a nice first point of contact for people not familiar with the zoning ordinance.”

While residents will benefit from the tool, Wynn said it is developers and contractors who probably will benefit the most. With zoning ordinances being different from municipality to municipality, Wynn said, even those with a deep knowledge of zoning regulations can benefit from the streamlined tool.

Shelby Township Supervisor Rick Stathakis said the tool represents another step forward for the township to make economic development easier and more accessible.

“Clearzoning is especially significant, though, because it gives a leg up to small business and individual taxpayers to take part in the growth of our township,” Stathakis said in a statement.

“Development can be hard enough for large firms that have full staffs of engineers and lawyers, but for small business owners, understanding zoning ordinances and ensuring compliance can be prohibitive to a project. With Clearzoning available, many of these hurdles can be overcome, because our codes will be much clearer and more accessible.”

To access the Clearzoning tool, visit the Shelby Township website at www.shelbytp.org, navigate to the Planning & Zoning Department page and click on the “Shelby Township GIS Portal” under “Zoning Ordinance & Maps.”

<http://www.candgnews.com/news/township-introduces-new-interactive-zoning-tool-107217>