

HALFMOON TOWNSHIP
Planning Commission Meeting
March 5, 2013 7:00 pm

Present: Danelle Del Corso, Bob Eberhart, Sam Evans, Jordan Finkelstein, Lorin Nauman
Absent: John Stevens, Allen Wilson
Others present: D. J. Liggett, CRPA; Susan Steele, Township Manager; Melissa Gartner, recording secretary

1. Call To Order

Chair Ms. Del Corso called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. Citizen Comments

None

3. Approval of February 19, 2013 Minutes

Motion. Mr. Nauman moved to approve the minutes of February 19, 2013. Mr. Finkelstein seconded. Vote: 5-0.

4. Reports

a. BOS Update

Ms. Steele reported that at the last meeting, the BOS finalized the Comprehensive Plan comments with no changes from the draft version. Then, Ms. Del Corso led a strategic planning session. Ms. Liggett compiled the findings from this session and distributed copies to the PC members. The BOS used a ranking system from one to five to respond to questions regarding whether the Township is rural or suburban, types of desired growth, levels of regulation, management of park facilities, spending of township funds, and public engagement. Comments tended to fall in the middle of the spectrum, which will help to guide decisions toward a moderate path. Ms. Del Corso said knowing the BOS responses will also help the PC tackle future issues like zoning.

Mr. Evans asked if it would be possible to distribute these questions on Survey Monkey for the Township citizens. Ms. Steele said typically, response is low and the cost to have a professional survey developed is high for such a low response. However, she will make sure these results are posted on the Township website. Mr. Eberhart said these only reflect the opinions of four supervisors, not the residents of the Township.

b. Zoning Officer's Report

Mr. Piper was not present. Ms. Steele said there are potentially eight new homes proposed to be built in the Township in 2013, including two in the Trotter Farms subdivision and four in Orchard Manor.

c. CRPC Update

Ms. Del Corso said there was no update since the CRPC will meet on March 7.

d. Open Space Board Update

Mr. Eberhart reported that the OSP has not met in 2013.

5. 2013 Planning Commission Work Program

Ms. Del Corso explained that typically, the Work Program is determined in January but due to the Comprehensive Plan and implementation strategies, it was delayed until this time. Potential topics are listed below:

- Evaluation/Recommendation on Agricultural Zoning District
- Ridge Overlay District
- Zoning Analysis of Residential Development Potential in the Township
- Identifying Potential Desirable Mixed Uses

Ms. Steele said that the Evaluation/Recommendation on Agricultural Zoning District is currently being considered by legal counsel at the request of the BOS, and may not come to the PC until Ms. Yurchak is finished advising on any relevant legal issues. She recommended moving this to a lower priority on the PC list since it will not come before the PC in the near future. Mr. Eberhart questioned why the PC could not get involved, regardless of the BOS action. Ms. Steele said it would not be efficient to deal with it before it is referred from the BOS. Currently, the ag zoning district is under litigation because of certain areas of ambiguity in language.

Ms. Liggett explained that some municipalities (Ferguson, Harris, Patton) in the Centre Region have adopted a type of Ridge Overlay District. This District is enacted in areas where steep slopes of 25% or greater and colluvial soils (stony, high ground water table, etc) make it not well suited for development. In a Ridge Overlay District, property owners typically work with a soil scientist as part of the development process to determine the best location for construction without negatively impacting residents downstream or downslope. The underlying ag zoning would stay in place, so the Ridge Overlay District would add site-specific requirements to the existing ag zoning requirements for development.

Ms. Del Corso said that perhaps instead of focusing on spot issues or topics, the PC should tackle broader themes for particular zones in the Township. Mr. Nauman said that the ridge overlay and yield plans are the only modulating tools the Township has to affect development because public sewer is not an option outside the RGB.

Ms. Del Corso suggested this could be an opportunity to create a master plan to work in conjunction with the future land use map. In that way, the PC would not be spending time on issues the BOS might not want to discuss in the next few years. Ms. Steele added that in the meantime, the Centre Region is working on the DRI process and may change the requirements for COLDS sewer systems and the RGB itself. Ms. Liggett then explained that DEP is focusing on decreasing the amount of nitrates going back into groundwater and surface water. Despite the fact that agriculture is responsible for much of the nitrate contributed to groundwater, DEP is examining the impact of on-lot septic systems and nitrate generation. Ms. Liggett said that if the proposed legislation is adopted in the future, DEP will require Best

Management Practices and protection credits to be used for any new on-lot septic systems. The cost for these new systems will bring them more in line with the cost for centralized advanced wastewater technologies, which could lead developers to consider a centralized rather than decentralized (on-lot systems) approach to wastewater disposal. Centralized wastewater treatment and disposal would support higher density development than the Township currently sees.

Ms. Del Corso summarized by reviewing the Work Program topics list and noting that all of these topics are related to zoning. She suggested that the PC focus on zoning this year, by reviewing ordinances and discussing specifics at the meetings. A holistic approach might be the best use of PC time and attention. Members agreed. Ms. Liggett said one way to begin might be to focus on desired land uses in different areas of the Township and then figure which zoning district would be most appropriate. She shared that Ferguson Township has four different rural zoning districts: Agricultural Research, Rural Agricultural, Rural Residential, and Forest and Game Lands. Mr. Eberhart suggested PC members take a drive through Ferguson Township to see the successes of that Township's ordinances in preserving land from high density development. Members were also interested in seeing other examples of best practices.

Mr. Eberhart was concerned that land owners and developers might react negatively to any changes in zoning. Mr. Nauman suggested that those individuals should contact a developer and an engineer, subdivide their properties under current regulations, and then put the development plan away until they are ready to sell. Ms. Steele agreed and said this is why there are public hearings on zoning changes, so residents have ample time to take action.

Ms. Del Corso suggested reviewing other municipal zoning ordinances for the next meeting, particularly Forest zoning. Ms. Liggett said that this is an opportunity for the Township to decide its own destiny. If Halfmoon Township proactively develops a clear plan of how and where development should occur, it will be more successful than reacting to individual developers. Ms. Steele said the more a municipality can plan ahead, the more credibility it has at the Regional level.

Mr. Evans asked to organize this discussion by defining the problems: a.) zoning is ambiguous or too broad, b.) zoning definitions might be too limited, c.) a forest overlay plan may or may not be needed, d.) mixed use for the Township needs to be better defined, and e.) preserving agriculture is also ambiguous. He suggested that for the next session, the PC could define the problems from the past, and then examine other Townships' definitions and see what is usable for Halfmoon Township. Ms. Del Corso said that if the PC works to implement the Future Land Use Map, then the problems will become evident as members examine each area and investigate potential problems as the Map is implemented.

Ms. Steele said that previously, zoning was done to appease property owners because the RGB and the SSA would prevent high density development in the Township. Now, because advanced technologies exist and are being implemented in other locations, high density development will not be kept out of the Township without zoning.

Ms. Del Corso asked the PC members to read R-1 zoning regulations for the next meeting. Ms. Liggett will collect and distribute for review the R-1 uses and

intent statements for the six municipalities in the Centre Region. She said that the PC will notice that there are inconsistencies in how R-1 is defined and implemented across the Region; one goal of the Comprehensive Plan is to unify this language over time. Ms. Steele added that Halfmoon Township's R-1 also allows duplexes and the PC should think about that as well.

Ms. Del Corso summarized that for 2013, the PC has one item on its Work Plan: create an Implementation Plan for the Future Land Use Map. Members agreed.

6. Matter of Record

- The next PC meeting will be held on March 19. Agenda items may include discussion of the Kristie and Richard Weiss preliminary/final plan, as well as the R-1 zoning designation.

7. Adjournment

Motion. Mr. Nauman moved to adjourn. Mr. Evans seconded. Vote: 5-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Melissa Gartner
Recording Secretary