

HALFMOON TOWNSHIP
Planning Commission Meeting
March 6, 2012 7:00 pm

Present: Danelle Del Corso, Bob Eberhart, Larry Fennessey, Jordan Finkelstein, Lorin Nauman, Joe Tylka
Absent: John Stevens
Others present: D. J. Liggett, CRPA; Susan Steele, Township Manager; Melissa Gartner, recording secretary

1. Call To Order

Chair Mr. Del Corso called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

2. Citizen Comments

None

3. Approval of February 21, 2012 Minutes

Mr. Eberhart asked for clarification and further discussion of two items on the Work Plan. These will be discussed during a different part of the meeting.

Motion. Mr. Nauman moved to approve the minutes of February 7, 2012. Mr. Finkelstein seconded. Vote: 6-0.

4. Reports

a. BOS Update

Ms. Steele said at the last BOS meeting, they conducted business as usual. At that meeting and the next meeting they will continue the public hearing on the OSP application regarding the second Podgurski property (the parcel partially located in the Village Zoning District).

b. Zoning Officer's Report

Mr. Piper gave the following report to Ms. Steele: On January 29, 2012, he issued a permit to S&A Homes for a 2-story family residence in Trotter Farms. In February, he received and issued the driveway permit off Harness Road.

c. CRPC Update

Ms. Del Corso stated that they met March 1. They are continuing with the Comprehensive Plan and holding monthly work sessions on each of the Elements. Jim May will come to the April 3 PC meeting to discuss Land Use and Transportation Element. SCASD OPP Director Ed Poprik gave an update on some planned major improvements, especially repairing the bleachers and a collapsing retaining wall at Memorial Field. Four elementary schools need repairs (Corl Street, Houserville, Radio Park, Lemont). A major renovation at the High School still needs funding; if funding becomes available, the project would be tentatively scheduled for 2017-2018. Mr. Tylka asked about some tree clearing on Whitehall

Road for a bike path. Ms. Liggett said Whitehall Road will be widened from Atherton Street to West College Avenue. In response to a question regarding funding for the project, Ms. Liggett and Ms. Steele explained that major transportation projects must be put on Long Range Transportation Plan (20 years), which is broken into 4-year increments. There is an evaluation process to rank projects, and projects are completed as funding is available. One of the highest needs is for the interchange between I-99 and I-80 but it is not moving up because of the high cost; smaller affordable projects are moving up faster because they can be accomplished. Ms. Liggett also said the shoulders are being widened on Whitehall Road from West College Avenue to Tadpole Road. Ferguson Township is funding that project. Ms. Steele said the bike path funding comes from the Transportation Enhancement federal monies, and the road funding comes from a more competitive source. Once the bike path money came in, the road project moved up in priority so the two could be done simultaneously.

Ms. Del Corso also reported that College Township approved a microbrewery pub to be built in Lemont in the former Lush Brothers “barn”.

Mr. Tylka asked if there was a funding benefit if the County were designated as “bike friendly.” Ms. Liggett said while there is no funding provided but the designation is desirable from an economic development perspective. For example, some businesses look for this type of designation as an example of quality of life in a community when they consider relocating facilities.

5. Rural Preservation Developments – Yield Plan

Ms. Liggett reviewed the request from the February 21 PC meeting to consider adding language to the Township’s subdivision regulations which would add a soils testing requirement to the design standards for rural preservation developments. The resulting yield plan would verify that the soils are conducive to on-lot septic disposal and that there are at least two sites suitable for an on-lot septic system for each lot shown on the yield plan. That would determine the maximum number of lots to be built. This model comes from Patton Township, which has implemented this approach for the Greenmoore Village, Pantops, Echo Hills, and Ambleside Phase IV developments.

Mr. Tylka wanted to confirm that the RPD ordinance is a Township ordinance and asked for specifics on the requirements. Ms. Liggett explained that the RPD is included in the Township Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances. It applies to any agricultural property greater than 10 acres that will be developed for residential housing. Using smaller neighborhood lots (<1 acre) is a component of the zoning regulation. The zoning establishes the district and the subdivision rules specify how the land can be developed.

Ms. Liggett then shared a handout explaining the current RPD structure and requirements:

- Agricultural Zoning District
- Residential developments on lots of 10+ acres
- Two Options
 - Option 1 – Neighborhood lots
 - Require 50% open space

- Option 2 – Country lots
 - No open space requirement since lots are already large
- Density neutral
 - If you have 100 acres, you must leave 50 acres vacant. You could still put 100 houses on the remaining 50 acres. This is the maximum you could build on the property.

The current ordinance has the following procedure:

- Step 1: Identify primary conservation areas on the site
- Step 2: Identify secondary conservation areas on the site
- Step 3: Determine maximum number of lots permitted
(100 acres – 20 acres of primary conservation areas = 80 developable acres)
- Step 4: Identify 50% Open Space Land (for Option 1 Neighborhood Lots only)

The primary and secondary conservation areas could be part of the required 50% open space.

Step three determines the maximum number of lots permitted.

Ex: 100 acres – 20 acres of primary and secondary conservation areas = 80 developable acres. 80 developable acres – 30 more acres to meet the 50% open space requirement = 50 acres. You could put 80 houses on 50 acres.

Mr. Fennessey asked if someone played with the math with Option 2, they could put in a few large lots and pack the front of a development with 2-acre lots, avoiding the open space requirement. Members discussed this as a possible conflict with the intent of the ordinance. Ms. Steele noted that this would be a good idea for future discussion. Members then reviewed some of the specifics of several hypothetical developments.

Ms. Liggett explained how the ordinance would change if it included a yield plan:

- Step 1: Identify primary conservation areas on the site
- Step 2: Identify secondary conservation areas on the site
- *Proposed Step 3: Prepare informal yield plan showing number of lots permitted under A-1 zoning (Options 1 and 2)*
- *Proposed Step 4: Conduct soils testing to determine the maximum number lots that can be constructed with the yield plan*
- Step 5: Identify 50% Open Space Land (for Option 1 Neighborhood Lots only)

For example, if you have 100 acres, but only 10 lots pass the yield plan with 2 suitable soil profiles, you can only build on those 10 lots. The soil, not the zoning, determines the maximum number of lots.

Mr. Tylka asked if anyone had come back against Patton if they had passed a soils test but then failed the perc testing. Ms. Liggett said Patton Township has not had any problems with developers of the properties using the yield plan. She pointed out that the Township does not guarantee anyone the ability to develop a certain number of lots. Just because a zoning ordinance says you can put "x" number of houses on a property, does not mean the soil can support it. The soil is the limiting factor in determining how many houses can be built.

Ms. Liggett said that Halfmoon does allow septic systems on the open space in a development. Ms. Steele said that Ms. Yurchak clarifies it as “open land” rather than “open space”; the land is visually open but may not be available for agriculture or constructed recreation (tennis court, basketball court, swimming pool, etc.).

Ms. Del Corso asked the PC to review the proposed language change for Chapter 215 – Subdivision and Land Development, Rural Preservation Design Standards.

Mr. Fennessey asked for “The maximum number of lots is to be based on the sewage disposal capacity determined by the tract.” to be added to 4(d). Ms. Liggett clarified that regardless of whether a developer is doing neighborhood or country lots, he/she should still be required to do soils testing.

Members also discussed that Option 2 is only referenced once in Chapter 215, and if the PC wants the country lots (Option 2) to also be subject to the soils testing, perhaps a few clarifying paragraphs need to be added to explain/expand the different requirements for Options 1 and 2.

Mr. Eberhart asked to have the informal sketch plan submitted after the soils testing is completed, and Ms. Steele agreed. Members then suggested switching Chapter 215 proposed items (c) and (d) so that the soil excavations are done and then the informal plan is submitted to the Township.

Ms. Steele then raised the subject of landscape requirements. Members debated whether the landscaping requirements should be kept in the design standards or deleted. The language implies that the Township enforces compliance to the tree and shrub requirements. However, if the language is deleted, then no one has to plant anything. The reality is that these matters are enforced by complaint, rather than enforced proactively. The Planning Commission agreed to retain the landscaping requirements.

Ms. Liggett will draft language to add to the subdivision requirement and bring it to the next PC meeting on March 20.

6. Private Roads and Shared Driveways

Ms. Steele reviewed a recent fire incident during which the fire companies could not access the property through Mahala Street and the Game Lands from the Halfmoon Township side.

Ms. Steele is working on a notification for private road residents to remind them to keep their access roads open for emergency vehicles and clear of snow, brush, and mud. She would see it as a friendly reminder for residents regarding what they must do to keep roads clear for emergency service providers such as EMS and fire.

The Heritage Road location will no longer be serviced by Port Matilda; the Alphas will cover it. Mr. Fennessey asked which fire companies actually serve the Township. Ms. Steele said that 70% of the community is served by Port Matilda, and the other 30% is served by Warriors Mark. The Township pays both companies for fire service. The 9-1-1 call center has a map that shows the separate service areas.

The 9-1-1 coordinator met with Halfmoon Township and said the biggest concern is the shared driveway situation. Fire companies can easily miss stacked addresses. Any more than two houses on a driveway should have an address. For

example, the recently approved country lot development off of Route 550 has a shared driveway serving five lots. The driveway should have a name (Country Lot Lane) with house numbers, and be identified along Route 550. This would also put it into the GPS and 9-1-1 system. In effect, that would turn his shared driveway into a private road. However, the Township does not allow private roads since regulations were passed in 1993.

To make a private road into a public road, you must assess all of the neighbors' properties, and bring the road up to Township standards. Mr. Fennessey suggested a way to eliminate private roads one at time: since there are no more private roads, only two houses at the end can remain on a shared driveway, and everything else must be brought up to public roadway standards.

The Township driveway ordinance specifies that a shared driveway can have up to four houses. A shared driveway does not have a name. Ms. Liggett explained that other Townships require that private roads have a 33 foot right-of-way and be mud-free. In addition, at the time of plan approval, an agreement is signed between the property owners and the Township specifying the conditions under which the private road may be dedicated and accepted by the Township.

Members discussed making a motion to reduce the number of lots on a shared driveway from four to two. Ms. Liggett and Ms. Steele offered to draft language for discussion at the next PC meeting. One concern is that because shared driveways are much less expensive than public roads in a development, developers may create separate driveways for each house along Route 550 and cause a different type of hazard. Future discussions should include access points, residences vs. more commercial properties, etc.

Mr. Eberhart noted that he reviewed his agreement since he lives on a private road. The agreement does not compel a resident to assist with maintenance, and if a resident does nothing, his/her neighbors cannot enforce compliance.

7. Public Meeting on Parks, Trails, and Community Facilities

The public meeting is next Thursday on March 15 at Way Fruit Farm. Members have distributed fliers to their assigned newspaper box routes. Ms. Liggett handed out the most recent copy of the PowerPoint presentation, and showed the posters to be displayed on easels around the meeting area. Members then briefly discussed financial details for park development and the Township budget. Ms. Liggett offered to make a slide showing new park development costs, but the consensus was to steer discussion away from overwhelming financial statistics.

Ms. Liggett reported that Jason Coopey said the PC can access the dining room after 2:30 to set up. Melissa Gartner will sit at the sign-in table and make sure everyone signs in.

Ms. Del Corso volunteered to introduce the presentation, and then Ms. Liggett will cover the next set of slides. Mr. Kirsten will cover the PRB slides. Members thanked Ms. Liggett for her great work on the PowerPoint slides.

The final discussion was to remove the proposed parks on Marengo Road and Houtz Lane and the Autumn Meadow Park expansion from a few slides in the presentation.

8. Matters of Record

- The next PC meeting will be held on March 20. Potential agenda items include shared driveways, the yield test language for the RPD, a possible discussion of the Halfmoon/Patton Township Area Plan, and a debriefing of the Town Meeting.
- A presentation by CRPA Director Jim May regarding the Land Use and Transportation Elements of the Centre Region Comprehensive Plan is tentatively scheduled for April 3.
- Two regional workshops on the Regional Growth Boundary and Sewer Service Area have been scheduled for June 4 and June 20. Both meetings will be held at the Millbrook Marsh Nature Center near Puddintown Road. The presentations will be similar, but the June 4 meeting is targeted toward PC members. The June 5 meeting of the Halfmoon PC might be cancelled so members could attend the June 4 meeting instead.

9. Adjournment

Motion. Mr. Nauman moved to adjourn. Mr. Tylka seconded.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Melissa Gartner
Recording Secretary