

HALFMOON TOWNSHIP
Planning Commission Meeting
October 2, 2012 7:00 pm

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

1. Call To Order

Chair Ms. Del Corso called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

2. Citizen Comments

Mr. Don Houtz reviewed the e-mail he sent to the PC and Ms. Steele last week. He was unsure of the land use project's objective, and wanted clarification on the overall plan and the procedure that will be used to poll the residents. He attended other Township meetings and thought this project would be used to eliminate development. His suggestion was to poll the residents to find out exactly what type of expansion the majority wants in the Township. Then, the Township could use that information to find out what kind of base is needed to sustain each desired expansion (ex., 500 needed for a convenience store).

Ms. Liggett explained that the Land Use Maps will be used in the overall Comprehensive Plan for the six municipalities in the Centre Region. She added that, in addition to BOS and PC discussions, community surveys had been done in 2003, 2007, and 2010 to assess the residents' preferences. Results from those surveys indicate that residents want to maintain the rural and agricultural character of the community. The purpose of the Land Use Map is for the Township to decide, if development were to occur, where it should logically and efficiently be located. She said it makes sense to keep the development on the eastern side because a sewer line extension across the Patton Township line would be more feasible than trying to lay a sewer line across the Township to reach development on the western side. Also, if residents want to keep the Township rural, then placing higher density development on the western side would result in increased traffic driving across the Township through the sections supposedly planned to stay rural.

Mr. Houtz wanted more clarification about population projections. Ms. Liggett said that by 2040, CRPA expects the Township population to increase to approximately 4,600 people. In the 2010 Census, the Township had a population of 2,667. Mr. Houtz was concerned that land owners should be allowed to do whatever they want with their property, within reason. Ms. Del Corso explained that nothing has changed; the Future Land Use map is only a vision. Mr. Eberhart said that if major changes are to occur, the people must have a chance to give their opinions. Ms. Liggett said the BOS asked about public input in the Comprehensive Plan; she said that a local meeting would be best for public comments, since the Comprehensive Plan town meetings were not well attended. Ms. Del Corso said she will ask Ms. Steele to forward that request to the BOS.

Mr. Nauman said that farmers want to keep their A-1 zoning, and the Township does not have public sewer. Until public sewer is allowed through an expansion of the RGB or the DEP will permit advanced technologies in sewer treatment, the Centre Region will not allow high density development in the Township.

3. Approval of September 18, 2012 Minutes

Mr. Eberhart made one correction. The sentence under Citizen Comments should read: "Since *the western part of Houtz Lane* has been paved, residents are driving at public street speed and creating a hazard."

Motion. Mr. Nauman moved to approve the minutes of September 18, 2012. Mr. Finkelstein seconded. Vote: 6-0.

4. Reports

a. BOS Update

Ms. Steele was not present. Ms. Liggett said that the Board met on September 27. They discussed the future land use map and then held a work session on the budget.

b. Zoning Officer's Report

Ms. Liggett reported that a three-bedroom house is being constructed on an empty lot in Stormstown.

c. CRPC Update

Ms. Del Corso reported that the CRPC will meet this Thursday on October 4.

5. Future Land Use Map

Ms. Liggett distributed copies of the Halfmoon Township Possible Future Land Use Map (dated September 27, 2012). This map was based on BOS comments from their September 27 meeting. The BOS was not in favor of the map showing build out under current zoning that would allow widespread residential development. Instead, they wanted a map that would keep some areas in agriculture, including local and commercial farming. West of Smith Road, with the exception of already developed residential neighborhoods, should be kept primarily for agriculture. East of the Wildlife Corridor, apart from existing residential neighborhoods, should be a mixed use area. She also distributed a revised Halfmoon/Patton Area Plan Proposed Future Land Use Map to show the change that the mixed use area will be on the south side of Route 550, and the residential area will be on the north side.

Mr. Tylka said that even though the colors look more palatable to the BOS on the new version of the Future Land Use Map, the zoning has not changed. Therefore, the old (predominantly yellow/residential) map could still happen unless the zoning is changed.

Mr. Nauman asked if the equity value of the land would change if the Township down-zoned. Mr. Tylka said in the current market, if a land owner sold his development rights, the property value would drop. He added that the yield test would also drive development, since some property owners may think they can develop 1 house per acre, but the soil will not support the wastewater treatment.

Ms. Liggett said the BOS wants to proceed slowly and discuss the down-zoning issue with the larger landowners in the Township. She also asked what PC members thought of starting with re-zoning the properties already in the Open Space Program; those owners have already leased their development rights for 99 years. However, she added that doing so might reduce interest in the OSP. Mr. Nauman said it might be informative to contact those property owners. However, if the OSP failed in the future, the Township might have the zoning but not the funds to make the payment agreements and the leases dissolve. Mr. Eberhart said that that might be considered spot zoning to apply it only to preserved properties.

Mr. Tylka said that if the Possible Future Land Use Map is approved, does it mean that zoning may change in the future to reflect this vision? Ms. Liggett said it does send a message to residents and other municipalities that development could occur in the eastern portion, and extending the sewer line across the RGB could be a possibility.

Ms. Liggett said that there are Centre Region communities with existing ridge overlay protection regulations because of slopes, soils, etc. Examples of these regulations are:

- Hire a soil scientist to determine optimal house placement, based on suitable soils for development and avoidance of steep slopes.
- Ensure that run-off from development will not cause problems for Township roads below.
- Develop responsibly within the context of existing environmental features.

Regulations in North Carolina and California state that one cannot build above the tree line. Locally, municipalities have not implemented this type of aesthetic regulation, but have looked at environmental features on the ground (slopes, soils, etc).

Mr. Eberhart asked for a definition of mixed use. Ms. Liggett said it is loosely translated as more than one use. She referenced the Land Use definitions sheet from the previous PC meeting, noting mixed use is an area for a mix of urban uses (i.e., commercial offices, industrial offices, residential, or public and institutional) and is best utilized when there is no single use located in the development. For example, a residential area with a park or school is still residential, but a development with residential uses above a store front would be mixed use. Mr. Eberhart said that mixed use implies a higher density, and cannot be achieved with on-lot septic. Ms. Del Corso said that is why it would be located next to Patton Township and the RGB. Mr. Tylka asked if sewer service could be extended through the Wildlife Corridor or the Game Lands. If it cannot cross the Wildlife Corridor, then the rest of the Township might be cut off from public sewer access. Ms. Liggett said the Game Lands have typically been considered a natural break for sewer, but sewer has been placed under land still being farmed in the Centre Region.

Mr. Nauman said there is a lot of land west of Loveville Road that is denoted as Ag on the map, but is actually forested ground. Mr. Eberhart said that the land south of the Game Lands is also forested. Mr. Nauman asked about the difference between forest and agricultural zoning. Ms. Liggett explained that forest and agricultural zoning districts are typically rural districts with similar characteristics. A ridge overlay district could cover various zones, and is generally based on slopes and soils rather than

forest land use. Ms. Liggett offered to research forest zoning in other municipalities and bring information to a future meeting.

Mr. Eberhart reminded the PC again about mixed use and asked if the Township really wanted higher density. He said that Halfmoon wants to be rural and has tried to protect open space and agriculture, so he does not think that high density/mixed use should be allowed on the map without discussion. Mr. Tylka asked about the financial impact of the build-out on the rest of the community. He said it would be helpful to know the financial effect of increased development, and increased fire coverage, police service, and municipal management, on the rest of the Township. Mr. Eberhart said that previously, Penn State used Mr. Tim Kelsey's Extension workbook to calculate the opportunity cost of a development. Mr. Stevens said that Mr. Kelsey had presented information to the PC before, and could be invited back. Mr. Nauman said it would be helpful to know the cost comparisons of an A-1 build out versus a higher density development to justify any zoning changes.

Ms. Liggett said without a common vision for land use, there is nothing to stop property owners from trying to put higher density wherever they want rather than where it makes the most sense. Mr. Tylka reminded the PC of Mr. Ben Pisoni's discussion about a developer who chose a different source of water rather than connect to the Halfmoon Water Authority, which led to an expensive, more complicated way to put out fires.

Ms. Liggett said that the current development plan of one house/acre across the Township may not be able to sustain the future desire for services, such as fire and police, or parks. She offered to contact Mr. Kelsey, and suggested that his information may be of interest to the BOS as well. A join BOS/PC meeting could be scheduled to discuss future land use and development costs.

6. Official Map

Ms. Liggett distributed copies of the Official Map and the Official Map Fact Sheet. As part of the budget retreat, the BOS discussed potential improvements to Autumn Meadow Park, and proposed walking paths along shared Township roads. For example, as Loveville Road is improved in 2013, plans call for it to be widened to accommodate a shoulder for walking. The BOS noted that this information was incorporated into the Official Map that was presented at the Town Hall Meeting in March, and asked that the PC review and finalize the map for future BOS consideration. She noted that the Official Map will be a discussion at a future PC meeting.

7. Matters of Record

- The next PC meeting will be held on October 16. Agenda items will include a continued discussion of the fire protection regulations with the Port Matilda and Warriors Mark Fire Chiefs, and a review of the Official Map.
- The November 6 PC meeting coincides with Election Day this year. The PC members decided to cancel this meeting. During the October 16 PC meeting, members will discuss whether an additional PC meeting is needed in November.

8. Adjournment

Motion. Mr. Stevens moved to adjourn. Mr. Nauman seconded. Vote: 6-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Melissa Gartner
Recording Secretary