

HALFMOON TOWNSHIP
Planning Commission Meeting
October 4, 2011 7:00 p.m.

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

1. Call to Order

Chair Ms. Del Corso called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

2. Citizen Comments

None.

3. Approval of September 6, 2011 Minutes

Motion. Mr. Tylka moved to approve the minutes of September 6, 2011. Mr. Eberhart seconded. Vote: 6-0.

4. Reports

a. BOS Update

Ms. Steele reported that the BOS has been working primarily on budgeting. They held a retreat on September 28, with the first budgeting session last week and another one is scheduled for Monday, October 10. Ms. Del Corso asked about the BOS decision on the Halfmoon Land Company waiver request. Ms. Liggett reported that the BOS reviewed comments from the Township Solicitor, Zoning Officer, and Township Engineer, and as Planner, she presented comments on behalf of the PC. She also explained the pros and cons of the issue and answered questions. The BOS decided to approve the waiver request and the plan that required the waiver. The BOS also thought the Engineer's recommendation to require a shared driveway agreement was prudent, in addition to the PC's comments on improving the driveway and using the dry hydrant. Based on the improvements and investments into the property, the BOS decided this waiver request was a unique case, rather than setting a precedent.

b. Zoning Officer's Report

No report because Mr. Piper was not yet present.

c. CRPC Update

No report yet because the CRPC will meet on Thursday, October 6.

5. Proposed Park Trails Map Update

Ms. Steele and Ms. Liggett met with the PRB on August 9 to present the draft Proposed Park Trails Map and the Official Map to solicit comments. Ms. Liggett

explained that two PRB members are also Trotter Farm residents who expressed concern about public use of the Trotter Farm trails and road systems.

The Chair of the PRB then had the group discuss Township-wide concerns about the proposed trail. The consensus was to present the trail concept at a public meeting for the whole Township; any concerned residents could use this opportunity to voice their opinions. Ms. Liggett asked if the PC would consider hosting this public meeting and what materials might be helpful to present the concept. Mr. Stevens asked who had the responsibility to maintain the trails; Ms. Steele clarified that it was still S&A Homes since ownership has not yet been turned over to the HOA. Mr. Tylka said that since residents are paying their taxes, the Township couldn't demand to use their trail system. Ms. Steele agreed but added that the road system is public and anyone is free to ride on the roads. Ms. Del Corso said that using the road system only meant adding signage along the streets.

Mr. Fennessey asked if anyone had read the actual Trotter Farm plan that showed the legal status of the walkways, easements, etc. Ms. Steele said that Ms. Liggett reviewed the documents, and learned that the trails were part of the open space, which was specifically conveyed to the HOA. There was no indication of a Township dedication. The existing Parks Plan had language indicating the Trotter Farm trail system was public, but the deeds of dedication only covered the community roads.

Mr. Fennessey stressed that this plan was for the long-term benefit of future Township residents. The intent was for the future, with no immediate need to construct trails, and the issue should be presented that way. Ms. Liggett added that the trail was not an immediate threat since there were still issues to resolve with the Wildlife Corridor and a new park to fund and construct.

Mr. Tylka asked about the length of the little trail that actually went through Trotter Farm, and Ms. Liggett and Ms. Steele estimated less than a half-mile. Mr. Tylka asked if the Township might offer to maintain the trail, and Ms. Steele said that the Trotter Farm residents were not enthusiastic about that offer.

Mr. Eberhart asked Ms. Liggett if she had met with Clearwater Conservancy. Ms. Liggett said she spoke with Bill Hilshey about a trail through the Wildlife Corridor. Mr. Hilshey did not want to have bicycles disturbing the invertebrates and smaller animals, but would not resist a walking trail. Mr. Eberhart said the conservation easement was written to allow a walking trail; cyclists would need to dismount and walk their bikes through the Corridor.

Mr. Eberhart followed with a question about entry into the Game Lands from the Wildlife Corridor. Ms. Steele said, on request from residents, the BOS previously rejected the parking lot and maintained trail in 2006. The easement into the Game Lands still exists; an individual could park on the street and walk through a self-made trail.

Ms. Del Corso summarized that the intent of the trail was for planning purposes only and the Trotter Farm connection was not the only unresolved issue. Ms. Liggett said that to get people from Sawmill to Trotter Farm, an arrangement also needed to be made for an easement along Lone Pine, a private street.

The most action in the near future would be "Share the Road" and "Watch Children" signage. For a public meeting, Ms. Del Corso suggested a PowerPoint to

present background information. Ms. Steele added that the 2008 survey information, and the BOS request to the PC and PRB for trail system possibilities, should also be included. She also said it might help to explain the purpose of the Official Map is and how items are added.

Mr. Fennessey said that the PRB was tasked to plan for future parks. He added that the lands currently earmarked as future parks could be used as anchor points to show the logic of connecting trails. He suggested stressing the question, "How do kids safely get to these parks?" His point was that older kids were more likely to bike to parks themselves, rather than have parents drive them, necessitating the need for a safe connection to the parks. Mr. Tylka added that since the proposed parks were not in/near Trotter Farm, the flow would be outward and away from their development.

Mr. Fennessey asked how much a mailer would cost. Ms. Steele said that a listserv publication would reach approximately 500 of the 900 homes in the Township. If the PC wanted a mailer, she could put it in the budget for next year. One statistic listed 95% of Township residents have internet access, so posting this on the Township website and listserv could reach almost as many people immediately at almost no expense.

Ms. Liggett suggested advertising it as an invitation to see what the PRB plans for new parks and the PC plans for trail connections. Mr. Eberhart asked if this meeting should be hosted jointly by the PC and the PRB, but Ms. Steele said that two of the five PRB members were Trotter Farm residents. Mr. Fennessey then said the PRB should display their proposed park equipment improvements, and the PC could display the proposed Official Map and Trail Map additions. Ms. Steele said that this would be a good way to gather public opinion before the upcoming budget meetings and help prioritize funding decisions for the next year. In the last five years, the Township experienced an \$85,000 reduction in revenue and many budget requests had to be reprioritized. This was the reason the spending survey is planned for 2012 to generate more citizen feedback on Township wants/needs.

Ms. Liggett said she would start working on a PowerPoint, and at the next PC meeting, the PC could schedule a joint planning meeting with the PRB this fall. The public meeting could then be held in early 2012.

6. Comprehensive Plan – Rural Resource Area

Ms. Liggett said this was an outgrowth from the PC meeting on September 6 and Mr. Jim May's presentation on growth management strategies within the Comprehensive Planning process. Since the 2000 Comprehensive Plan was completed, the existing growth management strategy concerned the Regional Growth Boundary, where the sewer services, denser developments, more public infrastructure, and more public services were located. The RGB does not extend to Halfmoon Township. The Municipalities Planning Code allows municipalities to identify Rural Resource Areas; this Rural Resource Area classification could be beneficial to Halfmoon Township to protect farmland, forests, mining, and other Township resources from future development. She asked the PC to consider where in the Township members thought might be good regions to identify as RRAs and what kind of tools might be needed to preserve those resources.

Ms. Liggett explained the Act 153 Open Space Preservation Program map; existing OSP properties were shown in green and pending properties were shown in gold. There are 2,000+ acres currently enrolled in the OSPP. She also explained the Ag Security Area Map of April 2009. The property owners who have identified their properties as belonging to an Ag Security Area are protected from nuisance complaints from neighbors and municipal interference.

The PC discussed this subject in September 2010 after Mr. May gave a presentation on development trends in the Township. Mr. Tylka asked what the endgame would be, and Ms. Liggett said that while much of the Township was zoned A-1 for agriculture, it did not protect farmland from residential development. To have an RRA, a Township must have zoning that does not permit 1-acre lots. The A-1 zoning would allow 1-acre lots; a Rural Resource Area with stricter zoning would permit 10-acre lots, for example. Discussion continued on whether 1-acre lots or 10-acre lots would benefit property owners more.

Ms. Steele added that 11% of the Township tax parcels were in Clean and Green so the Township was only making 25% of the assessed property value in income. These property owners already made a commitment not to develop and are reaping a tax benefit. Mr. Fennessey said that Clean and Green properties were allowed a one-time "less than 2, greater than 10" sale without affecting their taxes.

Ms. Steele said that when rezoning occurs, someone would always be unhappy. The security of being located outside the RGB, because public sewer could not come to Halfmoon, protected the Township from dense residential developments. Now, Mr. Rob Boos has cautioned everything has been developed that can, future developers will bring "new and innovative technology" to build package plants, and these developments will occur in the Township.

Ms. Liggett said from a development perspective, 1-acre lots are an inefficient use of land; public sewer is not likely to be extended from the RGB for less than 400 houses. The way the Township is currently structured, it is not prepared for the future. CRPA has ideas but implementation occurs at the municipal level. Mr. Fennessey said that the PC's goal was always to plan for the future, and this is a mechanism to protect agricultural resources before they are carved up into jigsaw developments and concentrate growth wisely in certain areas. He asked about the full list of resource areas. Ms. Liggett listed the following from the MPC to clarify: resource areas would include agriculture, timbering, mining and quarrying, forestry, game lands, recreation, and tourism. These were specifically areas that public infrastructure would not be included. Mr. Eberhart added that some of the Township land was critical for water recharge, and therefore water quality issues should also be included.

Mr. Eberhart reminded the PC that in the past, the PC tried to restrict development and it was a divisive issue. He added that it should not discourage the PC from advocating a zoning change, but the PC should be prepared for resistance.

Ms. Steele asked if Ms. Liggett had suggestions for RRAs. Ms. Liggett said RRAs made sense in the western end of the Township, with increased development in the eastern end. Also, in Stormstown, the village zoning did not support on-lot sewer, so a real village with village-type density would require a package plant. The

BOS also expressed interest that some development should be allowed in the Township; now the question is how to manage that development in the future.

Mr. Stevens asked if any other municipalities have taken action on this. Ms. Liggett said that Ferguson already has this type of strict zoning in place and their farm lands are protected.

Discussion continued on steep slopes, flooding areas, and soil quality. If the PC zoned the area on the north side of Route 550 as a RRA, it would not take away much "prime" land for development. One idea is to plan for smart growth, rather than zero growth.

Mr. Eberhart said that residential land is more costly to the Township than agricultural land, but Ms. Steele said that residential land brings in earned income. Ms. Del Corso said that a growth management strategy does not promote development, but it does protect the areas where the Township does not want development.

For the next meeting, Ms. Liggett will bring information on steep slope locations and aerial photos showing active farmland. Ms. Steele will pull Clean and Green property information. Mr. Tim Kelsey, PSU Extension and Township resident, has given presentations on whether development pays for itself; he also prepared a workbook for municipalities to determine a cost-benefit analysis on development. Mr. Kelsey will be invited to a future PC meeting to discuss these topics.

7. Matter of Record

The next PC meeting will be on October 18.

8. Adjournment

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Melissa Gartner
Recording Secretary