

HALFMOON TOWNSHIP
Planning Commission Meeting
October 16, 2012 7:00 pm

Present: Danelle Del Corso, Bob Eberhart, Larry Fennessey, Jordan Finkelstein, Lorin Nauman, John Stevens, Joe Tylka
Absent: none
Others present: D. J. Liggett, CRPA; Susan Steele, Township Manager; Tim Kelsey, Penn State; Todd Kirsten, BOS; Andrew Merritt, BOS; Mark Stevenson, BOS; 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 October 2, 2012 Minutes

Motion. Mr. Stevens moved to approve the minutes of October 2, 2012. Mr. Tylka seconded. Vote: 6-0. (Mr. Nauman had not yet arrived.)

4. Reports

a. BOS Update

Ms. Steele said the BOS has been working on the budget. Mr. Kirsten, Mr. Merritt, and Mr. Stevenson, members of the BOS, were present at this PC meeting to hear Dr. Kelsey's presentation, to aid their ongoing future land use discussions.

b. Zoning Officer's Report

Ms. Steele said that DEP denied the Maloney sewer planning module because the property owner needs to submit some additional information. Staff signed the revised plat but did not return it to Mr. Maloney. Until the module is approved by DEP, no action will be taken on the Maloney property.

c. CRPC Update

Ms. Del Corso did not attend the October 4 CRPC meeting. Ms. Liggett said that Mr. Greg Kausch, CRPA Transit Planner, gave a report on the Universal Access study. This is a program in which the person who rides the bus does not pay a fare, but the ride is not free--costs are paid through other means. Mr. Kausch is exploring the possibility of Universal Access in this area. The study is in the beginning stages. Also, CRPC recently shifted to a "consent" agenda, with minor items that need only staff attention (ex: minor ordinance revisions) being presented for approval all at once.

5. Future Land Use Map

Members and visitors introduced themselves, and Ms. Liggett reviewed the Existing Land Use Map from the 2000 Comprehensive Plan. She then described the Halfmoon Possible Future Land Use Map (the “yellow” map) that shows what could happen under current zoning if all of the A-1 agricultural land was developed as residential. Even though visually the Township looks agricultural, there is no zoning in place to protect or prevent such a build-out from happening.

Ms. Liggett then explained the latest version (September 27) of the Halfmoon Township Possible Future Land Use map, which includes a mixed use area at the eastern edge of the Township, and agricultural and forest uses in the north, south, and west. She clarified that mixed use is two or more typically dissimilar uses (not residential and school, but rather residential and commercial). This has a more urban style of density.

Finally, she showed the Halfmoon/Patton Area Plan Map, which was designed as part of a traffic flow study. The study was intended to coordinate land uses across the municipal boundary, rather than have abrupt changes because of an arbitrary but invisible municipal border. This is why the possible mixed use area on the Halfmoon Possible Future map was placed at the eastern edge, adjacent to similar development in Patton Township.

Mr. Tylka showed the close proximity of the Regional Growth Boundary/Sewer Service Area to the Township line and the proposed Mixed Use areas in the Township. Because there is no public sewer in Halfmoon Township, and the Sewer Service Agreement permits only systems that utilize soil remediation outside the RGB/SSA, the Township is limited to larger lot development that can accommodate a primary and secondary septic site. Designating a mixed use area on the eastern side of the Township adjacent to the Patton Township boundary and the existing public sewer service area seemed to make the most sense.

Ms. Liggett noted that before it prepares a recommendation to the BOS regarding the Possible Future Land Use map, the Planning Commission wanted some information regarding the impact of mixed use development on the Township. She commented that there appear to be two schools of thought related to development: 1) development does not pay for itself; and 2) development broadens the tax base.

Dr. Kelsey, PSU Cooperative Extension and Township resident, said that development does not always pay for itself. He explained that adding development for families with school-aged children does not typically provide enough tax revenue to municipal government and school districts to offset the school expenses needed for the children. If one does not include the school districts, then the cost analysis comes down to the impact of increased development on provided services. If the Township can add residents to the tax base without having to pay proportionally for more services, then there is a financial gain through property taxes and EIT.

He said that in southeastern PA, cluster development has been efficient and effective. However, Halfmoon Township does not provide many broad public services. At this time, you can add additional homes and it will not significantly impact the day-to-day costs. Adding more roads to accommodate more residents might generate more road maintenance costs, but this is minor compared to protective services. When the Township reaches a threshold at which the population density requires

contracted police services, increased fire protection, municipal sewage treatment and water service, then the costs rise dramatically.

Ms. Steele said that citizens are requesting more services from the Township, and Dr. Kelsey said that this can happen when the number of people changes or the composition of people changes. The people who move into the eastern side of the Township will probably identify with Patton Township and the services their neighbors are already receiving.

Dr. Kelsey said one option might be to create a special district or zone in that area, and contract municipal police from Patton that would only cover that portion of the Township. Those residents would pay for and receive coverage from the Patton Township police. If commercial development comes to the Township, businesses will want available police services to deal with graffiti, shoplifting, and loitering. It is difficult for rural communities to rely on the State Police. Police services are the most expensive service to supply, followed by paid fire service.

Ms. Liggett asked if the eastern portion of the Township were developed as large-lot residential rather than mixed use, what would be the tipping point at which the increase in population would require additional services. Dr. Kelsey said that the point is when enough of the population demands a certain service. Apartments and businesses will typically bring a greater demand for police services. For example, when Wal-Mart builds a store, the corporation asks the community to have one full-time police officer available to deal with shoplifting and other store-related complaints.

Mr. Stevenson asked Dr. Kelsey about planned village communities with higher density residential blended with office and commercial. Dr. Kelsey said those communities are very positive, but developers struggle to find the right balance of residential and commercial. Mr. Kirsten asked for the pros and cons of mixed use, rather than solely residential. Dr. Kelsey said that mixed use does help more with the tax base.

Mr. Stevenson asked about fire service for a mixed-use development at the eastern end of the Township, which might be better served by the Alpha Fire Company in State College rather than the Port Matilda Fire Company. That would then require financial participation in COG to receive fire service. Dr. Kelsey said it might be possible to put together a set of special service fees for those residents. Ms. Steele said Halfmoon could contract a certain level of services through Patton Township and make it an efficient net of service.

Mr. Nauman asked Ms. Steele for an inventory of available subdivided lots in the Township, so that when the real estate boom eventually occurs, the Township can predict where developers would build easily. She said Orchard Manor has four lots, Halfmoon Land Company has four lots, Trotter Farms has about 20 lots, the recently approved Morris Road property has two lots, and there are three lots still available on Apex Lane. Mr. Kirsten said there are also two available lots on Granny Lane. Mr. Stevenson said that the first two triggers for staff expansion would be on the road/maintenance crew and more part-time administrative staff and a full-time Zoning Officer.

Mr. Eberhart said that Stormstown is already zoned as Mixed Use but has not been fully used. He thought this was a more logical place for that type of development as long as sewer could be arranged. Ms. Steele said that Mr. Cory Miller, Executive

Director of UAJA, would not consider bringing UAJA to Stormstown without including everyone else along the way. She added that this would constitute an expansion of the RGB/SSA and would require a Development of Regional Impact application. Mr. Eberhart said that when Stormstown was zoned for mixed use in 2003, it was set up to utilize a COLDS system designed and operated by UAJA. However, UAJA is not interested in maintaining Stormstown alone.

Ms. Del Corso said that this might lead to two different populations, like Ferguson has, and questioned what would that mean for the Township. Members agreed that this would amplify an existing situation between farmers and homeowners. Dr. Kelsey said that some municipalities use a ward system for electing supervisors so that representation would still be equally based across the Township.

Mr. Tylka asked questions about the advantages and disadvantages of new families with school-aged children versus non-child residents. Dr. Kelsey said that if someone were going to move into the school district, district-wide residents would pay for those children no matter which municipality they lived in. If they moved into the Township, residents would at least benefit from adding to the tax base here by paying municipal taxes. Mr. Tylka followed by asking about emphasizing senior communities instead. Ms. Steele said that those residents would not pay Earned Income Taxes, which is how most of the Township income is generated. Mr. Stevenson added that retirement communities also would not receive tax credit for property in the Clean and Green program, which reduces the Township's property tax revenue. Dr. Kelsey said with the senior communities, the Township would receive no EIT, but it would still receive property taxes.

Ms. Steele noted that using the formula from the "Costs and Revenues of Residential Development" workbook, for each new home that comes into the Township, it brings \$77K in earned income which is much more than property tax revenue. Discussion continued that a mixed use, planned community is a labor-intensive process that would require the right developer, a lot of municipal assistance and residents who buy into the whole concept.

Dr. Kelsey asked about the Open Space Program and whether it could be paired with a strategy of higher density in the eastern part of the Township. Mr. Stevenson said the Township had considered a Rural Village Zoning District for land in the eastern part of the Township. For increased density in this zoning district, a developer could either contribute to the Open Space Program or self-negotiate preserved land elsewhere in the Township by purchasing development rights. The developers who reviewed the zoning district did not find it to be economically feasible.

Mr. Eberhart reviewed Mr. Houtz' comments from the October 2 PC meeting regarding residents' wishes. He said that Township residents would see an expansion of the public sewer service area into the Township as a radical departure from what the current preference is for the Township identity. Mr. Eberhart thought that there should be more input from residents to build a consensus. Mr. Kirsten said that he would welcome more input, but short of going door-to-door, he did not know how to get feedback from a significant number of residents.

Ms. Steele said after the Future Land Use map is submitted for the Comprehensive Plan, the Township would hold a public hearing for the Official Map and could include the Future Land Use map in that discussion. While the Future Land Use map would

be in the Comprehensive Plan, it could not be implemented until the zoning is changed. The BOS is hoping to have the Official Map finished by February or March 2013. If the Future Land Use Map were presented at the same time, it could be used to generate resident input on the zoning changes. Mr. Kirsten said seeing the Halfmoon Land Company development plan was a shock, learning how many homes could actually be built on the land across from the cemetery.

Mr. Fennessey said the most recent revision to the Possible Future Land Use Map (September 27, 2012) is a desired state but the "yellow" map reflects the actual zoning in effect in the Township. He also cautioned that just because the Township wants little shops, does not mean that little shops will happen. For example, College Township wants the Hills Plaza to be filled, but many of those stores still sit vacant. This type of development is driven by the market and the economy. He also said that at the moment, the land in Halfmoon Township may not be suitable for higher density development because of the requirement to use soil remediation for wastewater disposal outside the RGB/SSA, but DEP standards can change and if they do, developers will focus on the available land here. Also, development on the eastern end will bring in a different population which will demand increased services.

Ms. Steele said that when the population hits 5,000, the requirements change: the Township will have to provide curbside pick-up of refuse twice a year, minimal security/police protection, etc. Currently the population is approximately 2,600, so half of the expanded population would be "new" residents with "new" ideas.

Dr. Kelsey said that the BOS could not impose new services on a special district. The residents would have to vote to approve a special tax to support the district. If they do not vote in favor, then the revenues for the service would not be available. Ms. Steele said these assessments should be part of a subdivision approval, and a separate improvement district would be created for existing developments that want to participate in those services.

Mr. Stevenson said that it was possible to keep the eastern end as residential, rather than mixed use. The next step would then be in the central and western areas to ask land owners to consider down-zoning to protect the rural character of the rest of the Township.

Ms. Del Corso brought discussion back to the Future Land Use Map because the Township needs to submit something for inclusion in the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Stevenson and Mr. Merritt said that the Mixed Use area could serve as a place holder for future development and even a buffer to drive other residential development in the Township. Mr. Fennessey said Mixed Use will raise the value of the land. Ms. Steele said that she has been asked about two-four bedroom duplexes/townhouses but the zoning does not currently exist for that type of development.

Mr. Nauman said that all of the "yellow" residential areas that are not currently subdivided need to be cut in half and shown as open land because the Township has a 50% open land regulation. The potential development should be reduced because half of the gross acres available in A-1 must be preserved as open land. He said that would significantly impact the look of the map. Members discussed a cross-hatch or shading across the properties to keep the underlying color visible but show that part of the property was committed to open space. Ms. Liggett pointed out that when developers identify their 50% open land area, it is not typically a contiguous block of

land. It could be a trail system around the perimeter of the property with smaller open spaces between houses, such as in Trotter Farms.

Mr. Eberhart said he thought that residential development always cost the municipality. Dr. Kelsey said that in general, when school expenses and municipal expenses are totaled together, single family homes with school-aged children will cost the municipality. If only the municipal expenses are considered, then residential development will usually cover its costs, unless there are long roads for maintenance/plowing or a new need for police services not currently being provided.

Ms. Liggett said that the mixed use area does not have to be specifically defined. However, it must be followed by specifics in terms of the zoning tools that will make it happen. Mr. Kirsten asked if the new veterinary office would be allowed in A-1 zoning; Ms. Liggett said that zoning was changed to permit the veterinary office as a use in the A-1 zoning district. Mr. Kirsten followed by saying that if similar types of offices were planned for the eastern edge of the Township, the A-1 zoning would have to be changed there as well.

Mr. Nauman reviewed the financial impact of down-zoning. His banking officer told him that if a property owner wants a HELOC, the bank will look at capital improvements on five acres of land. If the property owner wants an Ag loan, the bank will only appraise at current ag values and not consider any potential for development. Down-zoning will not hurt property values from a lending perspective. He added that this will be helpful to know if residents are concerned about the impact on their land. Mr. Stevenson said that this worked in Ferguson Township because there was a group of farmers who wanted to preserve ag land and agreed to down-zoning.

Ms. Del Corso asked members for final feedback on the September 27 version of the Possible Future Land Use Map. Ms. Liggett said that there are a few minor changes that need to be made. The Smith property will be colored as residential instead of agriculture, and properties owned by the Upper Halfmoon Water Company will be shown as transportation/communication/utilities.

Mr. Eberhart said that this discussion only addressed part of what the BOS had wanted the PC to research. He said the BOS also wanted protection for the western part of the Township, from Smith Road to the Township line. Currently the land is zoned for agriculture but he felt it would not stay ag. Ms. Liggett said the BOS wanted some tools to preserve agriculture in the western part of the Township, such as:

- going to the ag community to gauge interest in self down-zoning,
- looking at yield planning so a developer or property owner would have to determine the suitability of the soil for wastewater disposal before determining how many units the land could handle,
- looking at ridge overlay protection so that property owners that have steep slopes or alluvial soils would be restricted in the number of units allowed and the developer would have to work with a soil scientist to determine the best location for construction, and
- looking at the potential for transfer of development rights.

Ms. Steele said the BOS wanted the PC to finalize the Future Land Use map by December so it would be included in the Comprehensive Plan. Then, in 2013-2014, the PC would put together a plan of implementation options, including definitions. Public

discussion would continue and more prioritized planning could occur. Mr. Fennessey asked about the status of the yield plan; Ms. Liggett said it is ready to go to the BOS. Motion. Mr. Fennessey moved to forward the Future Land Use Map, with the recommended additions made, to the BOS. Mr. Stevens seconded. Vote: 7-0.

6. Matters of Record

- The November 6 PC meeting has been cancelled because of Election Day. The PC members decided to reschedule the meeting for November 13.
- The next PC meeting is currently scheduled for November 20. 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 proposed Official Map.

7. Adjournment

Motion. Mr. Stevens moved to adjourn. Mr. Nauman seconded. Vote: 7-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Melissa Gartner
Recording Secretary