

HALFMOON TOWNSHIP
Planning Commission Meeting
December 20, 2011 7:00 p.m.

Present: Danelle Del Corso, Bob Eberhart, Jordan Finkelstein, John Stevens, Joe Tylka
Absent: Larry Fennessey, Lorin Nauman
Others present: D. J. Liggett, CRPA; Mark Stevenson, BOS; Jime Eberhart, spouse; Linda Stevens, spouse; Bill and William Gartner, family; Melissa Gartner, recording secretary

1. Call to Order

Chair Ms. Del Corso called the meeting to order at 7:11 p.m.

2. Citizen Comments

None.

3. Approval of December 6, 2011 Minutes

Motion. Mr. Finkelstein moved to approve the minutes of December 6, 2011. Mr. Tylka seconded. Vote: 5-0.

4. Reports

a. BOS Update

Mr. Stevenson reported that the BOS handled several routine approvals related to OSP leases at their last meeting.

b. Zoning Officer's Report

Ms. Steele and Mr. Piper were not present.

c. CRPC Update

No CRPC meeting was held.

5. Planning Commission Recognition

Mr. Stevenson complimented the volunteer spirit shown by two Commission members. Two members have each served the Township on the Planning Commission for over 20 years! Mr. Stevenson presented John Stevens and Bob Eberhart with framed certificates for their many years of service.

6. Sewage Service Outside the Regional Growth Boundary

Ms. Liggett reviewed that she previously wrote a memo to the Public Services and Environmental Committee to help them answer a question the Township posed after Mr. Maloney's planning module submission. The BOS denied Mr. Maloney's planning module for several reasons. One reason was that his proposed wastewater treatment plant did not match the regional Act 537 Sewage Facilities Plan and it did not match the Implementation Agreement for areas outside the sewage service area. Halfmoon Township, because it is located outside the sewage service area, must use either individual on-lot septic or community on-lot sewage

disposal systems. The BOS also decided to contact COG and ask for further clarification. COG referred the matter to the Public Services and Environmental Committee, and this committee called in experts to share information on advanced wastewater technology treatment systems.

These experts were Mr. Rob Boos from the Williamsport Department of Environmental Protection, Mr. Jason Wert with Mercuria North America, who helped to draft the 2006 Act 537 Sewage Facilities Plan, and Mr. Brian Dempsey, a Penn State environmental scientist.

The experts concurred that there are advanced wastewater technologies available to serve areas outside the public sewer service area, and the engineering exists to put those systems in place in Halfmoon Township. One critical aspect is the long-term operation and maintenance of such systems. A certified operator like UAJA would be a logical choice to operate the systems. Because of the Township's high quality streams, this would be a complex system to operate. Discussion then moved to the question if this was what the Township wanted to happen. If the Township allows this technology to be used, it could lead to increased density and increased growth. Another issue is the status of the Regional Growth Boundary (RGB).

If the RGB is so small that it cannot accommodate the current rate of growth for next 20 to 30 years, then development may come into Halfmoon as an RGB expansion. The PSE Committee directed CRPA staff to compile information on the ability of the existing RGB to accommodate growth, including evaluation of projected population growth and the percentage of land still available for development inside the RGB. This information will then be presented at joint workshops with all PCs and then all elected officials to explain the available technology and the current RGB status and help address the question of whether alternative treatment outside the RGB is necessary.

Ms. Del Corso asked about the connection to the Comprehensive Plan. Ms. Liggett explained that the Act 537 Plan addresses sewer service while the Comprehensive Plan focuses on land use planning and proposes to direct growth where services already exist. Ideally, the CRPC plans to hold the joint workshop in the next six months.

Ms. Del Corso asked what the critical point would be to take action. Ms. Liggett said that the Township should consider where it would like future growth to occur before a developer submits a plan for approval. She said currently requests to expand the sewer service area or to consider advanced wastewater technology are typically driven by projects or developers, rather than proactively planned by the municipality before a developer came into the Township with a plan.

Mr. Tylka asked about the comments Mr. Cory Miller, UAJA, had made at a previous PC meeting about Mr. Maloney's proposed wastewater system. Mr. Miller's impression was that the Maloney system had lower standards for water quality treatment than UAJA did. What would happen if Halfmoon allowed a lower quality system, and then in the future UAJA took over maintenance? Ms. Liggett explained that since the Township has high quality streams, the test is to prevent degrading the water quality below current levels. If the streams are already being affected by agricultural runoff or other impacts, then a treatment system does not have to improve the water back to a high quality, but must not degrade it further.

Mr. Eberhart asked about UAJA's reverse osmosis system, and Ms. Liggett said that in order to meet the high quality water requirements, reverse osmosis is the best method of treatment. However, this type of system is very expensive. Ms. Liggett then explained that in order to allow these new technologies, the Implementation Agreement and Act 537 Sewage Facilities Plan would have to be amended. That means all six signatory municipalities would have to agree to the amendment.

Mr. Eberhart asked why COLDS was allowed outside the RGB. Ms. Liggett said that COLDS enables the development of Rural Preservation projects. A few Centre Region municipalities, including Halfmoon Township, require a developer building residential units on agricultural property to preserve 50% of their area in open space. In order to prevent reducing the property owner's land value, developers will try to cluster the same number of units on half of the property. When this happens, it becomes difficult to place both primary and back-up sewage sites on each lot. Clustering COLDS systems would allow for smaller lots. The COLDS system also has piping to each house, so conversion to a public system could be easier than converting individual on-lot systems to a public system. The factor driving a COLDS system is the soil's ability to remediate wastewater.

Mr. Eberhart said that he thought the Village District concept was a good idea for the Township, and that COLDS would work best in that situation. Ms. Liggett agreed and suggested that the PC and the BOS decide if there are other areas in the Township where they like to see this type of development occur.

Mr. Stevens summarized that if the PC wanted to avoid a situation where the Township was forced to react to a developer, then they should decide in advance where the Township wanted development to happen.

Mr. Eberhart asked Ms. Liggett for survey results regarding growth. She reported the following results from the 2003 survey conducted by the Township:

- 89% of those surveyed favored growth strategies that protected rural character
- 69% felt that one house per acre was adequate density
- 71% were not in favor of increasing the density to one house per ¼ acre
- 30% felt that the growth rate in the Township in 2003 was about right
- 47% thought growth was too fast
- 87% were in favor of protecting the crest and shoulder of Bald Eagle Ridge
- 82% wanted parks linked with walking paths and bike paths

The results of a community meeting survey in March 2010 indicated the highest preference was to continue an agriculture-friendly approach in the Township. A region-wide community survey conducted in 2011 indicated that residents want access to open space and parks, and want to maintain a low level of environmental pollution. In addition:

- 91% want to balance community growth while protecting and enhancing the environment
- 84% want to coordinate land development activity with the transportation system
- 83% want to preserve prime farmland for agricultural use,
- 72% want to direct the majority of future growth to areas inside the RGB

Mr. Eberhart then said that he felt the Maloney development was not in tune with the general will of Township residents.

Ms. Liggett discussed the zoning technique used by Patton Township (yield plan) in which a sketch plan is prepared by the developer showing the environmental features that need to be protected. The remaining land is then perc tested to determine the number of units the soil is able to handle. The development plan is then based on the number of houses that can be built according to the perc testing. This is concept that Halfmoon Township may want to consider as well.

7. Matter of Record

The reorganization meeting has been scheduled for January 10 and the second PC meeting in January has been moved to January 24.

8. Adjournment

Motion. Mr. Stevens moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:52 p.m. Mr. Finkelstein seconded.

9. Annual Planning Commission Holiday Event

Good food and good discussions! Happy Holidays!

Respectfully submitted,
Melissa Gartner
Recording Secretary