

**MINUTES OF MEETING  
SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION  
May 18, 2010**

The Springfield Township Planning Commission (PC) held its semi-monthly meeting on the date noted above. Chairman Bob Gutowski called the meeting to order at 7:20 PM at the Horticultural Center of the Morris Arboretum, 303 Northwestern Ave., Flourtown, PA, with the following members present: Angela Murray, Joe Gerber, Bob Gutowski, Mary Holland, George Schaefer, David Sands and Joseph Devine. Absent: Jim Mascaro and Mandy Helwig. Commissioner Doug Heller and Rob Dunlop, Staff Liaison represented the Township and Jean Holland represented the Montgomery County Planning Commission (MCPC) this evening. Before the meeting was convened Bob Gutowski took the PC on a tour of the new facility at Bloomfield Farm recently completed.

**Minutes**

Minutes of the May 4, 2010 meeting were read. A motion to approve the minutes was made by J. Gerber and seconded by A. Murray. Motion approved unanimously.

**Board of Commissioner Update**

**D. Heller**

Com. Heller inquired about the progress made in making the PC approved minutes available at the Township web site. Mike Taylor has stated that the BOC has to make a direct motion to direct the PC to post approved minutes on the Township web site.

**New Business**

**Electronic Message Board Sign Ordinance Amendment**

Planning Commission reviewed the proposed amendments to the Township Sign Ordinance regarding installation of Electronic Message Board Signs. In discussion, it was relayed that the ZHB has had applications for such, but mostly by nonprofit groups who are seeking relief since their older style signs for relaying information to the community have become obsolete. The present proposed ordinance amendment was drafted by the township Solicitor at the direction of the BOC. The use in the proposed ordinance is only for non-profit organizations.

Jean Holland provided a memo outlining potential problems connected with allowing electronic message board signs, and some of the practices that are used by municipalities to control the use (memo has been attached for reference).

After review of the memo many PC members voiced safety concerns over allowing electronic message board signs as a "by right" use in the Township Zoning Code. The PC discussed the possibility of allowing the use as a special exception granted by the Zoning Board under strict conditions, or a conditional use granted by the BOC under similarly strict conditions.

Bob Gutowski stated that studies that he had read stated that an distraction for drivers that took their attention from driving for more than 2 seconds constituted a serious accident risk. Com. Heller also confirmed this view, and wondered whether, or not studies from the National Transportation Safety Board were available that might appraise the possible danger inherent in electronic message board signs.

After a good deal of discussion, the PC decided to defer the continuation until more information was available. Both Jean Holland and Com. Heller offered to do research on the subject and report back to the PC in the near future

### **Comprehensive Plan**

The overall review of the Township Comprehensive plan continued with the individual reviews of G. Schaefer, D. Sands and J. Devine:

G. Schaefer:

The comprehensive plan seems more a fact sheet than a plan. While all of the information provided can be useful, the facts should be placed in appendices – separate from the area of the plan itself (this would probably amount to 10 pages of plan and 90 pages of appendices).

Housing - this chapter should be expanded. More attention needs to be paid to diversity of housing stock. Currently 80 % of the dwellings in the Township are single-family detached dwellings. The diversity of people's needs for housing now, and in the future will call on many different types of housing.

Parks – more attention should be given to making sure that parks are available in all sections of the Township. The Township should mark certain areas of the Township for the development of new parks.

Transportation – we should look at ways to make the community more walkable and bikable. Trails should be greatly encouraged – especially those that lead to public transportation options.

Town Centers – Township should create flexible zoning in town center districts that encourages mixed-use development. This need is also a reflection of the need for more diversity in housing in the Township.

The Comprehensive plan should be much more aggressive in pointing the way to the future. The opportunity is there for us to have a real impact on what the Township looks like 10 years from now, and past that.

D. Sands:

In the Goals and Objectives section, add a transit oriented development section, a stormwater management section and a historic preservation section.

The transportation section should be updated with current data from PennDOT and Township traffic counts. Roadway improvements since the last comp plan should be updated.

We should encourage construction of sidewalks wherever possible to promote a walkable community.

Update rail service section. Fellwick Station is closed.

Updated bus service section.

J. Devine:

1. Introduction and Overview – Consider articulating a clearer statement on how the Township and its community sees itself and wants to develop in the future. Such a “mission statement” should serve as a guide for setting goals and objectives, planning and executing the Comprehensive Plan in a consistent and cohesive way.
2. Executive Summary – The priorities as expressed here still seem very relevant, with several additional points to consider (see “Chapter 2, Goals and Objectives” below). Also, why are all of the priorities set forth here not also set forth in the Goals and Objectives Chapter?
3. Chapter 2, Goals and Objectives - A more thorough, targeted and substantive discussion of goals and objectives should be considered. Avoid overly generalized, boiler plate language/concepts. Also, consider expressing prioritization of goals and objectives. Add as prominent goals and objectives, storm water management initiatives, further development of recreation/park facilities, the “greening” of the township through advances in technology and community planning , town/pedestrian-friendly center development for the Township’s commercial areas, and historic resource preservation.
4. Chapter 3, Natural and Scenic Resources – Comprehensive storm water management program should be considered. Historic resource preservation program should also be considered. Green infrastructure measures should be considered and encouraged.
5. Chapter 4, Housing Plan – Consider whether our housing stock is diverse enough for future demands.
6. Chapter 5, Transportation – Focus on developing bike and walking trails. A stronger sidewalk development plan should also be considered.

7. Chapter 6, Community Facilities – Address community open space and recreation needs. Amplify recycling program. Encourage energy efficiency technologies for municipality.
8. Chapter 7, Land Use Plan - Encourage redesign and redevelopment of commercial and industrial areas through coordinated mixed use building, landscaping, shade tree planting, improved circulation and creative design. Develop a more definitive and directed Strategic Plan for open space.
9. Chapter 9, Compatibility with Area and County Planning – A more in-depth examination of surrounding township compatibility should be considered.

A. Murray:

The Introduction and Overview should focus on how redevelopment should occur rather than on maintaining a status quo environment. This is not the same as encouraging growth and increased density. It is more a recognition that certain areas will change and that we want to direct that change positively. We want to maintain the best of our community character while encouraging appropriate areas for improvements. The issue of sidewalks is a good example and improved storm water facilities and maintenance is another as are continuing planting of street trees. Issues should be identified and goals developed to support the objectives.

The Goals and Objectives should be more targeted and specific. Not all “established areas” are the same.

While growth primarily occurs through redevelopment, infill or expansion, such growth is an indicator of a healthy community and the level of construction investment is a sign of economic prosperity and social desirability of a community. However, growth, redevelopment, infill and expansion can create tension within established communities because of the replacement of existing natural and built features with newer elements.

What data and patterns can be gleaned from analysis of Zoning Hearing Board applications; Planning Commission applications; Building Permit activity since 1998. What has been the impact of ZHB variances on development patterns?

Are the 1998 priorities the same and if not should be revised. What are the impacts of Long Range Regional Plans (DVRPC, Montgomery County) on the Township? What will be the impact of Zoning Changes in nearby communities, i.e., Chestnut Hill and Cheltenham?

What are realistic expectations for revitalization of industrial areas given technology and changes in manufacturing businesses? Do some of the old structures lend themselves to redevelopment for mixed-use, retail, housing, etc.?

What are the types of retail we want in different areas? For example, retail on Willow Grove is different from retail on Bethlehem Pike. Should we restrict office locations to second story or are we fine with offices in retail locations where the preference should be for retailers that provide pedestrian interest. Do we advocate for reduced curb cuts and shared driveways to encourage pedestrian activity?

Goals for Economic Development need to be established along with a plan for realizing the goals. If we want expanded business development, how do we achieve that given limited Township resources. What outside resources can assist with developing increased economic capacity? Analyze the potential revenue generated by different levels of commercial and mixed-use redevelopment and the impact of increased commercial and residential revenue on reducing the burden of residential taxes to support Township services.

What Montgomery County programs can assist with economic development? There are many programs listed in the current plan, but there is no information on how or whether these actually work for or are available to the Township. For example, it does no good to list CDBG if there are no areas that are qualified (low-income) that enable the program to be used.

How can we work with local businesses to keep them in the Township? Can we partner with other municipalities to seek funds for redevelopment of commercial districts?

Roadway and signal inventory, traffic, circulation, public transportation, traffic infrastructure improvements, parking requirements need to be expanded.

Our goals for Historic Preservation, Natural Features, Walking trails and connectors, bike lanes all need to be expanded and more focused.

Energy and Water Resource Conservation should be included. Impacts of reduced state budgets on community facilities (ex. library) and grant resources (ex. DCED) should be evaluated.

Motion to adjourn meeting at 9:10pm made by B.Gutowski and seconded by A.Murray.  
Motion carried unanimously

The next PC meeting will be at 6:00 p.m., May 18th, 2010 at the Township Building

R. Dunlop