

**MINUTES OF MEETING**  
**SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION**

**Tuesday, March 19, 2019**

The Springfield Township Planning Commission (PC) held its monthly meeting on the date noted above. Bob Gutowski, chair called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM with the following members of the commission present: Bob Gutowski, Dave Sands, Joe Devine, George Schaefer, Mandy Helwig, Angela Murray and Michael Bruce. Stacey Blankin and James Mascaro were unable to attend tonight's meeting. Commissioner Baird Standish and Staff liaison Robert Dunlop represented the Township and Community Planner Julia Detwiler participated on behalf of the MCPC.

**Board of Commissioners Update**

Com. Standish had no items on which to update the PC. He did relate that the Township recently agreed to sell a 2 acre parcel of land on Bethlehem Pike, adjacent to the Sunnybrook, for \$55,000.

**Minutes**

Minutes of the February 19, 2019 meeting were read. A motion to approve was made by Angela Murray and seconded by Dave Sands. The motion was approved by a unanimous vote, with George Schaefer abstaining.

**Multi-Family Dwelling Uses in Low Density Residential Zoning Districts**

Bob Gillies, 215 Woods Rd., Glenside stated that he was aware that a closed door discussion was taking place in conference room adjacent to the meeting room when he arrived for tonight's PC meeting. He asked Mr. Gutowski about the nature of this discussion and reminded the PC that all PC meetings and discussions had to take place in a meeting room that was open to the public. Mr. Gutowski replied that a meeting of the Historical Preservation Sub-Committee of the PC had been taking place. He further explained that this sub-committee had been created many years ago to create a draft of a Historical Preservation Ordinance at the behest of the Board of Commissioners (BOC). The sub-committee was meeting to review comments from the Township Solicitor's office regarding the latest draft of the Historical Preservation Ordinance. He stated that he believed that such a meeting was in accordance with all applicable Township and State laws regarding meetings.

Mr. Gutowski initiated the PC discussion of potentially making changes to Township code which might allow multi-family dwelling uses in low density residential zoning districts by stating that the BOC had received comments from several residents that were alarmed by the frequency of older stone houses being demolished to make way for subdivided lots in Wyndmoor. Mr. Gutowski was contacted to see if it might be possible to alter Township code to allow these older homes to be converted for multi-family use under certain circumstances. The most important circumstance is that the multi-dwelling conversion would be allowed only when the lot on which the home is located would be big enough to allow subdivision of the lot into 2, or more building lots. Under this condition the multi-family conversion would not result in any increase of housing density per acre in the district. To this end, at the 2/19/19 PC meeting the PC began a discussion of the subject which began to look into the possibility of altering Zoning code sec. 114-133 which was created a long time ago to allow larger Victorian homes to be converted to multi-family use in the AA, A & B residence zoning districts under stated conditions.

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Joan Parsons, 37 Hawkswell Circle & 1409 Church Rd. Oreland, asked Mr. Dunlop if her request to have the Township website updated with all approved PC minutes had yet been done. Mr. Dunlop answered that this process had not yet been completed. Ms. Parsons stated that she thought that it was very important for the minutes to be updated so that residents could check the activities of the PC. She elaborated that this was one of the most important concerns that she had related to making sure that her local government operated in an open manner where all residents could stay abreast of topics that might change their quality of life. Mr. Dunlop replied that he would make sure that Ms. Parsons had all of the PC minutes that she found relevant. Ms. Parsons asked if the property that was next to her home that operated as a bus garage would be eligible for an apartment building under any of the proposed changes for multi-family dwellings. Mr. Dunlop stated that he believed that the zoning of the property in question was limited industrial district and that no changes to this district had been considered during the current discussions. Ms. Parsons indicated that she was not in favor of making any changes to Township code that might allow an increase in the number of multi-family dwellings

Ms. Uehling, 826 N. Fairway Rd., Glenside asked if the PC was considering offering incentives for people to convert to multi-family use. She elaborated that this might create more different types of housing available in Springfield Township and allow more development of existing homes.

Mr. Gutowski answered that the PC had not proposed any incentives so far. The basic idea in offering the possibility of conversion would be to offer alternatives to knock-downs and subdivisions. The Township Comprehensive Plan lists as a goal to maintain the feel and character of existing neighborhoods. He agrees with the BOC that the proliferation of knock-downs and subdivisions in the Wyndmoor area does not meet this goal. Conversely, if existing houses were allowed to convert to multi-family use with too many dwelling uses allowed this would also not meet this goal. The PC is trying to find a way forward for the maintenance of neighborhood character and quality of life of residents by looking into this issue.

Sarah Gabriel, 1008 Fraser Rd., Erdenheim asked if any suggested changes for multi-family use would allow her to establish an independent apartment on the lower level of her house. Mr. Dunlop answered that he was not aware of any properties on her block that qualified for subdivision. Under current code, or any of the changes put forward so far she would not be allowed to create another dwelling unit on her property.

Judy Patitucci, 101 E. Wissahickon Ave., Flourtown informed the PC of a difficult experience that she had when her neighbor was granted a special exception by the zoning board in order to construct a new detached garage. She urged all government boards to take into account the rights of adjacent property owners when allowing changes. She also related her experiences in the real estate industry for the benefit of the PC.

William Sorg, 715 Avondale Rd., Erdenheim asked if the rules regarding subdivision could be explained. Mr. Dunlop stated that all residential zoning districts have a minimum lot area and minimum street frontage requirement – some examples of area and street frontage minimum were provided. Once the minimum area and frontage are double the lot is said to be subdividable. Com. Standish has communicated to the PC that the BOC would only consider a lot for multi-family conversions when it is subdividable.

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Bob Gillies addressed the PC again to ask why the PC is considering these changes now. Com Standish stated that some residents were concerned about demolishing houses to make way for subdivisions in their neighborhoods – so the BOC began to look into other possible uses that might keep some of the larger homes standing to preserve what people love about their neighborhood. The older stone house at 500 E. Gravers La., Wyndmoor might be used as an example. The house had a fire several year ago and no one can be found who is willing to rehabilitate a house that is that big that has been damaged by fire. There have been some inquiries into the possibility of converting it to multi-family use, but our current code doesn't allow it. So the house will be demolished to make way for 2 new houses. Mr. Gillies related that his experience in construction and as a Township Commissioner tended to agree with noted experts on development, such as Jane Jacobs, that the proliferation of rental units in a community usually coincided with the decline of the neighborhood. He urged the PC to look more closely at other examples of communities where an increase of rental units has occurred to see what happens to the community after the increase. He also stated that a multi-family conversion was allowed by conditional use it could leave a neighboring property owner with fewer possibilities to redress a loss in property value than a zoning ruling. If the conversion was allowed by special exception it could leave the neighbors with the possibility of appealing the ruling in court. Mr. Gutowski thanked Mr. Gillies for this suggestion and opined that the PC should study this issue of conditional use vs. special exception further.

Patrick Eddis, 720 Avondale Rd., Erdenheim asked Mr. Gutowski if a Solicitor for the PC could be pointed out. Mr. Gutowski answered that the provision of a separate Solicitor for the PC has never been provided in the past. Mr. Eddis asked if any members of the PC were lawyers. Mr. Gutowski said that Mr. Devine was an attorney. Mr. Eddis indicated that the Environmental Advisory Commission had 4 lawyers who were members. He also stated that he had heard members of the PC use the term “by-right”, and he asked if any member could direct him to where that term appeared in Township code. Ms. Murray suggested that in her experience as a professional planner that the term is frequently used to indicate a project which complies with all applicable zoning and subdivision/land development requirements. Mr. Eddis stated that as an attorney he believed that the term had no legal validity.

Joan Parsons addressed the PC again to ask what the zoning designation for the property under development at 910 E. Willow Grove Ave., Wyndmoor is. Mr. Dunlop answered that the property is located in the Business-1 zoning district which current allows multi-family use. He elaborated that the project under construction also received zoning relief from the zoning hearing board. She reiterated her position on the importance of posting the PC meeting minutes on the web site as it related to transparency in the operation of government. She asked if the PC meetings had ever been televised. Mr. Dunlop answered that they had not been televised in the past and that the process of televising meetings could add considerable expense to a very small budget allowed annually for the PC. Ms. Parsons replied that she feels that she pays enough taxes on 2 properties in the Township to make quibbles on such costs sound feeble.

Mr. Gutowski thanked all residents present for their input and stated that the discussion on multi-family use was still in a very early stage. There being no further business on the agenda, or requests to introduce new business, Ms. Murray made a motion to adjourn. This motion was seconded by David Sands and approved unanimously at 8:40 PM.

R. Dunlop